

Children of Divorce and the Church: A Survey of the  
Availability of Social Supports for Children of  
Divorce in the Church of the Brethren

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Doctor of Philosophy

by  
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*This dissertation, written by*

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## ABSTRACT

### Children of Divorce and the Church: A Survey of the Availability of Social Supports for Children of Divorce in the Church of the Brethren

James Galen Miller

This thesis measures the availability of social supports in Church of the Brethren congregations for children of divorce. Social supports are defined as individuals, programs, or services which help persons cope with crises or changes. Four elements of support are measured: (1) activity level, (2) interpersonal involvements, (3) emotional attachment, and (4) support ministries received.

Divorce is a difficult experience for children, especially in the first months following parental separation. Among theories of divorce discussed, this research supports the view that divorce is difficult for children because of social disruptions and economic changes which follow parental separation.

A definition is developed of the Church of the Brethren as a social support based on the Brethren theology of the church as a faith community. Official Church of the Brethren statements and policies about divorce are reviewed.

Two hundred Brethren children from divorce and non-divorce homes were surveyed. It was proposed that children of divorce would receive higher levels of support when compared to non-divorce children. In addition to divorce, the activity level in the congregation of the child and his or her custodial parent are examined as factors which



effect the level of supports children receive. An "interaction effect" was anticipated between divorce and activity level which would increase the differences in levels of support received by each group.

"Main effects" were found for both divorce and activity level of children and parents. However, in contrast to expectation, children of divorce received fewer supports than non-divorce children. Interaction effects were not found. Inactive children of divorce and children with inactive parents were found to receive lower levels of social support.

Children of divorce and custodial parents were less active in the church than were non-divorce children and parents. Extended family in the congregation, particularly the father's family, predicted lower levels of activity.

Because divorce is seen as socially disorganizing, concerns are raised about the effectiveness of ministry based on life in the faith community. Brethren congregations are encouraged to actively extend the community of the church in non-traditional ways to divorcing families.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Life has been worse for me than for other kids because I was a divorced kid. Most of my friends had two parents and those kids got the things that they wanted. Not having a dad is tough for me.<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of an adolescent boy, ten years after the divorce of his parents. For him, as for many children, divorce is a significant, life-changing event which profoundly affects his view of himself and his view of life. Though life may be happy and satisfying overall, children often recall their parents' divorce with sadness and little emotional resolve.

#### Statement of the Problem

Divorce has become a common occurrence in American society. Demographic studies show that between 1965 and 1980, the rate of divorce in the United States more than doubled. The rate of divorce in 1965 was 2.5 divorces per one thousand persons.<sup>2</sup> By 1980, it had risen to 5.2 divorces per one thousand persons.<sup>3</sup> While there was one divorce for every four marriages in 1965, in 1980 there was more than one

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<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Judith S. Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce: Report of a Ten-Year Follow-up of Early Latency-Age Children," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 57 (April 1987): 199.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1984, 104th ed. (Washington: GPO, 1984), Table 120, 84.

<sup>3</sup>USBC, Statistical Abstract: 1984, 84.

divorce for every two marriages.<sup>4</sup> The divorce rate has remained at approximately this level throughout the 1980s, with a slightly downward trend. The most recent statistics available show that in 1987, the rate of divorce stood at 4.8 divorces per one thousand persons.<sup>5</sup>

One result of the increased divorce rate is that divorce is touching the lives of many children. Sixty percent of the couples who divorce have children.<sup>6</sup> Annually, seventeen children out of each one thousand children experience parental divorce.<sup>7</sup> Each year between 1975 and the present, 1.1 million children have experienced the divorce of their parents.<sup>8</sup> Approximately one-third of all the children in the United States, before they reach the age of eighteen, will experience parental divorce.<sup>9</sup> Many of these children are quite young. E. W. Beal notes that two-thirds of the women who divorce are under the age of thirty and their children are under the age of seven.<sup>10</sup> In addition, approximately ninety percent of the children of divorce live with their mother as the primary-care parent, even when their father shares

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<sup>4</sup>USBC, Statistical Abstract: 1984, 84.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1989, 109th ed. (Washington: GPO, 1989), Table 134, 88.

<sup>6</sup>Paul C. Glick, "Children of Divorced Parents in Demographic Perspective," Journal of Social Issues 35 (Fall 1979): 170.

<sup>7</sup>USBC, Statistical Abstract: 1989, 87.

<sup>8</sup>USBC, Statistical Abstract: 1989, Table 132, 87.

<sup>9</sup>Glick, 174-75.

<sup>10</sup>Edward W. Beal, "Separation, Divorce and Single-Parent Families," The Family Life Cycle, eds. E. Carter and M. McGoldrick (New York: Gardner, 1980), 242-43.

custody.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, the incidence of divorce in the United States may be greater than these statistics would indicate. John Guidubaldi and others point out that thirty percent of the divorce petitions filed are withdrawn before completion and do not appear in statistical reports. Nevertheless, in many of these situations children experience the emotional impact of parental separation and the anxiety of possible divorce.<sup>12</sup> Divorce statistics also do not reflect the profound social and emotional chaos experienced by some children whose parents participate in several divorces with a variety of marital partners. Neither do statistics reflect the fact that a number of persons live together and separate without either legal marriage or divorce and are also not recorded in divorce rates. However, children in these families are likely to have a divorce experience which is quite similar to children whose parents divorce through the legal system and become part of the statistical record.<sup>13</sup>

Though divorce may be the understandable and sometimes necessary dissolution of an unsatisfying marital relationship, and is a common occurrence, the effects of divorce on children are often significant. Clearly, most children adjust well to parental divorce, some in a remarkably short period of time. Nevertheless, in the first months following parental separation almost every child feels some degree of

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<sup>11</sup>Glick, 117.

<sup>12</sup>John Guidubaldi, et al., "The Role of Selected Family Environment Factors in Children's Post-Divorce Adjustment," Family Relations 35 (Jan. 1986): 141.

<sup>13</sup>Guidubaldi, et al., 141.

emotional distress and social turmoil. As will be cited in Chapter 2, children's reactions to divorce can be seen in such forms as depression, sadness, failure in school, physical illness, socially unacceptable behavior, and withdrawal from friends. Lawrence Kurdek and Albert Slesky found that thirty-seven percent of all children of divorce have emotional or social difficulty to the point that psychotherapy or mental health care would be appropriate.<sup>14</sup> Also, of deep concern, divorce effects some children over a longer period of time. For those children who remain at the center of conflict between divorcing parents, or for those in families with frequent periods of organizational confusion (changes in visitation, custody, dwellings, etc.), the impact of divorce may go on indefinitely and eventually effect social and emotional adjustments in adult life.

The experience of divorce for children can be described as a series of transitions. Divorce is the transition from one familiar, two-parent family organization, to uncertain new living arrangements in a single-parent home, with initially unfamiliar custodial and visitation arrangements, or to a new "blended" family with equally unfamiliar step-parents and step-siblings. Children's lives may change frequently in the first months following divorce before families reorganize into consistent relational and living patterns. Much of the impact of divorce appears to be a result of these transitions.

While divorce is difficult, divorcing families appear to be particularly amenable to social supports which help them cope with

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<sup>14</sup>Lawrence A. Kurdek and Albert E. Slesky, "An Interview Study of Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Reactions and Adjustments to Divorce," Journal of Divorce 3 (Fall 1979): 5.

transitional stresses. Such support might be counseling, divorce recovery groups, day care, financial assistance, etc. However, as shall be outlined in Chapter 4, while social supports and services are desired by divorcing families, they may not be readily available in many communities. Importantly, this may include a lack of support from the church. In fact, the church may have little involvement in the lives of divorcing families. The problem of providing social supports for children of divorce by the church is the interest of this thesis.

#### Purpose of the Thesis

With a focus on one denomination, the Church of the Brethren, the purpose of this thesis is to measure the availability of social supports in the church for children of divorce who are affiliated with Brethren congregations. The goal is to discover the levels and forms of social support that children of divorce receive from Church of the Brethren congregations. Through an empirical research procedure, the thesis gathers pioneering information about the manner in which the church cares for children of divorce.

In brief, a survey was conducted among five hundred children and their parents from two hundred Church of the Brethren congregations to measure the amounts and forms of contact children have with social supports in the church. Four elements of social support were measured: activity level in the congregation; involvement in the interpersonal network of the congregation; the emotional bond with the congregation; and the number of specific support ministries received from the congregation. To discover the level of support received by children following parental divorce, the responses to survey questionnaires from

children of divorce are compared statistically to responses of children from non-divorced homes.

In Chapter 3, Church of the Brethren literature and official policy statements are reviewed to develop a Brethren "model" of support for children of divorce. The model is based on a theology of the church as a faith community, a common theological theme in Brethren literature and policy throughout the history of the church. The model is based upon the conclusion that support for children of divorce in Brethren congregations comes through the interpersonal life of the congregation, as well as the formal ministry programs. The Brethren believe that the love of God is a reality in the world through the loving bond that exists between persons in the faith community. The love of the faith community is a healing and reconciling force in conflicted or "broken" areas of life. For Brethren, divorce is a specific instance of brokenness. Loving relationships in the faith community are clearly extended to children. Official statements indicate a desire by Brethren to be supportive of children. Children of divorce are mentioned specifically as one group whose needs might be especially well met by the church. With the information gathered in the survey of the thesis, conclusions are drawn about the helpfulness and adequacy of this model of support for children of divorce.

The general research literature suggests that the relationship between the church and children of divorce may be distant and strained. David Chiriboga and others found that divorcing adults rate ministers to be among the least useful of all helping professionals in dealing with

divorce-related problems.<sup>15</sup> The same may be true for children.

Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly found that as few as five percent of all children of divorce ever talk to a minister about divorce.<sup>16</sup>

However, these findings reflect on the relationship between the clergy and divorced families--children and adults. Little is known about the relationship between children of divorce and the broader social network and resources in congregations. Literature from sources within the church, while not often based in empirical research, clearly describes the need for a more nurturing approach by congregations to divorcing persons. Richard Morgan, for example, develops a theology of divorce that emphasizes the need for the church to draw on themes of grace and resurrection to promote reconciliation and renewal for divorced persons.<sup>17</sup> Additional literature of this nature will be reviewed in Chapter 2. Unfortunately, Morgan is typical of this literature as he fails to focus on children in any substantial manner. In contrast, the research of this thesis has been designed to document the ways, if any, in which children of divorce participate in the broader life and relationships of congregations.

There are several reasons for placing the focus of the dissertation on a study of the church as a social support. With this goal the dissertation will be concrete and helpful to both the church and

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<sup>15</sup>David A. Chiriboga, et al., "Divorce, Stress and Social Supports: A Study in Helpseeking Behavior," Journal of Divorce 3 (Winter 1979): 121.

<sup>16</sup>Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, Surviving the Breakup (New York: Basic, 1980), 43.

<sup>17</sup>Richard Lyon Morgan, Is There Life After Divorce in the Church? (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 69-80.

children of divorce--goals valued by this author. Also, the general research literature describes the value and effectiveness of caring interventions with children of divorce from sources within the child's natural, existent social networks--schools, clubs, play groups, day care centers, etc. This thesis attempts to build an awareness of the church as one existent, though perhaps overlooked and underused, source of support. Finally, the methodology employed to measure the availability of social supports provides much-needed pioneering information. Hopefully, the results of this thesis will be a starting point for further discussions of ministry with children of divorce.

There are two primary reasons for concentrating this study on the Church of the Brethren. First, as shall be cited, the Brethren are a relatively homogeneous group of people. In the research process, factors such as education, income, and ethnicity are generally controlled. Second, the Church of the Brethren is the church home of this author. Personal preference influenced the choice to no small degree. In this light, one underlying bias of the thesis must be stated. This author clearly hoped to discover that the Brethren were an effective support for children of divorce. With equal hope, however, this author was able to control his bias and remain objective.

#### Definitions

Social supports. The term "social support" is derived from the research literature and is defined in some detail in Chapter 4. However, in general, the term refers to those individuals, institutions, programs and services which enable persons to master and cope with



crises, challenges, or changes in their lives.<sup>18</sup> Social supports can be services as concrete as day care, financial aid, transportation, and professional psychotherapy, or they can be as intangible as friendships, casual conversations, inclusion in supportive groups, and informal counseling by relatives and neighbors. Social supports are distinguished from the psychological makeup and personality traits of the individual and from problem solving techniques or skills which the individual employs to cope with crises and problems. As mentioned, children's contact with social supports in a Brethren congregation are measured by activity level, interpersonal involvement, emotional bond, and participation in concrete ministries of the church.

The Church of the Brethren. The Church of the Brethren is a small, Protestant denomination founded in 1708. The Brethren grew out of the left wing of the European Protestant Reformation.<sup>19</sup> Originally called the Dunkers, they have historically been influenced by both the Anabaptist and Pietist movements.<sup>20</sup> With headquarters in Elgin, Illinois, the modern-day Church of the Brethren consists of 1,100 congregations, spread across the United States in twenty-four districts. The total membership in 1987 was slightly more than 150,000 persons.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Gerald Caplan, Support Systems and Community Mental Health (New York: Behavioral, 1974), 6-7.

<sup>19</sup>Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1970), 473.

<sup>20</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 121.

<sup>21</sup>Church of the Brethren, 1988 Yearbook (Elgin, Ill: Brethren Press, 1988), 188.

Divorce. Divorce is defined as the legal dissolution of a marriage. Though much literature acknowledges the deleterious effects on children of parental separation, this research is limited to divorce and includes in the survey data only those children whose parents are divorced.

Children of divorce. Children of divorce are defined as those children who have experienced the legal divorce of their parents. While the effects of divorce may be seen in children of every age, in the survey of this thesis the study group of children are between the ages of eight and sixteen.

#### Methodology

The methodology of the thesis includes three steps: a review of research literature on children of divorce which demonstrates children's need for social supports; a discussion of the Church of the Brethren theology of community; and a survey of Brethren children who have experienced parental divorce to measure the availability of social support in Brethren congregations.

The initial discussion of the literature is a review of the general research literature on children of divorce. The purpose of the review is to answer several foundational questions: In what way does divorce effect children? Does divorce impact children in such a way that social supports seem useful? If the need for social supports is confirmed, are there indications about the forms of support that are helpful to children? And finally, is the central concern of this thesis, support by the church for children of divorce, a concern that is verified in other sources, both inside and outside the church?

The second element of the dissertation is a discussion of the Church of the Brethren as a social support for children of divorce. This segment is divided into three sections. First, a discussion of the Brethren theology of the church as a faith community and ministry as a task of each member of the community. Second, a review of "official" Church of the Brethren statements on marriage and divorce as they reflect the theology of community and call for caring ministries by the church to divorcing families. And third, a review of Brethren statements about ministry with children and the role of children in the faith community.

Two helpful related studies will be reviewed in this section, the work of E. James Carter and Eugene F. Roop.<sup>22</sup> Both studies discuss the history of Brethren statements and practices on marriage and divorce as they have applied to divorcing Brethren adults, particularly divorcing Brethren ministers. Both works have highlighted methods and procedures of church discipline as a common theme of Brethren statements and practices toward divorced persons. This thesis is helped by these works and extends their efforts into the area of children of divorce. Reviews of sections of these works are found in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

As mentioned above, the third segment of the thesis is a survey of children of divorce who are affiliated with the Church of the Brethren.

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<sup>22</sup>E. James Carter, Pastoral Care as Prophecy: A Survey in Historical and Theological Perspective of Church of the Brethren Clergy Divorced Between 1950 and 1979. Ph.D. Diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1980 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1980). Eugene F. Roop, "The Brethren and Church Discipline (I)," Brethren Life and Thought 14 (Spring 1969): 92; and "The Brethren and Church Discipline (II)," Brethren Life and Thought 14 (Summer 1969): 168.

The survey is descriptive and is intended to answer two basic research questions: One, do children of divorce in Brethren congregations receive any social supports from the church? Two, what effect does the activity level in the congregation of the child and the child's parents have on the availability of social supports for children in Brethren churches?

#### Expected Outcomes

To facilitate statistical analysis the two basic research questions have been translated into three research hypotheses. These hypotheses state the anticipated outcomes of the research. Hypothesis One is:

In the two years following parental divorce, children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren receive more social supports from Brethren congregations when compared to children from non-divorce homes.

This statement is an obvious and logical first step in the research process. It reflects the belief that because of the increased needs of children of divorce for social supports, and because of the stated desire of the Brethren to care for children of divorce, the social supports from the church for children of divorce are greater following parental divorce than for children from non-divorce homes. The belief is that children of divorce receive the normal amounts of support available from the congregation plus additional supports that are specifically related to their divorce experience--counseling, divorce recovery groups, divorce mediation, etc. Though the possibility has been stated above that divorcing families may have less contact with the church, for methodological purposes the initial hypothesis is stated in this positive fashion.

However, a likely possibility is that children's level of activity

in the church is also a factor in the amount of social supports they receive. A reasonable assumption is that those children who are more active in the congregation receive greater amounts of social supports than those children who are less active. This may be especially true for the Church of the Brethren which places its ministry with children, and children of divorce in particular, within the context of life in the faith community. Simply put, those children who are more involved in the faith community are likely to receive greater amounts of support from the community. Hypothesis One, though it is a necessary first step in this research process, needs to be expanded to account for the effect of the child's level of activity.

With this in mind, a second hypothesis is proposed which suggests that when the factors of divorce and children's activity level are combined an interactive effect can be seen. That is, each factor, divorce and activity level, in itself has an effect on the level of social supports received. The assumptions have been made that children who are more active receive greater levels of support and those who are divorced receive more supports. However, when the two factors are combined additional effects may be found because of the manner in which these two factors interact. As examples, children of divorce who are active in the church may receive greater levels of support than non-divorce children who are active. In contrast, though children may have divorced parents (creating a higher level of support according to Hypothesis One), if they are inactive they may receive much less support. In fact, they may receive less support than those children from non-divorce homes who are inactive. Through the use of

Analysis of Variance, tests were made to determine if either divorce or activity level produces a "main effect," or if an "interactive effect" is more descriptive of the combination of the two factors. Hypothesis Two is stated as:

The difference between the levels of social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren and the levels of social supports for non-divorce Brethren children are greater when the children are actively involved in the church. That is, there is an interaction between the effect of divorce and the effect of activity level.

In similar fashion, a third hypothesis is proposed which takes into account the role played by parents in children's relationship to the church. The two factors of divorce and parental activity level may also produce an interaction effect on the amount of social supports that are available for children of divorce. Hypothesis Three is stated as:

The differences between the levels of social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren and the levels of social supports for non-divorce Brethren children are greater when parents are actively involved in the church. That is, there is an interaction between the effect of divorce and the effect of parental activity level.

Hypothesis Three also reflects the Brethren theology of community as a basis for caregiving to children of divorce. However, it introduces an awareness of the overall influence of parents on children's church participation and an acute awareness of the situation of custodial parents. Custodial parents often face increased responsibilities such as work or school which may decrease their level of participation in the church. As a result of the beliefs on divorce and family life held by the church, custodial parents may also have feelings of discomfort as divorced persons in the church. Also, one or both parents may find it difficult to remain in settings in

which they had for many years been identified as part of a marital couple. An important factor in the church's ministry with children of divorce may lie in maintaining an active and positive relationship with parents who divorce, particularly the custodial parent.

### Contributions of the Thesis

The thesis makes contributions to several areas of knowledge. First, it contributes information about children of divorce and the possibly disruptive effects of divorce on the child's extended social network. This information reflects on the various theories developed to understand the nature of children's divorce experience and the reasons that divorce has an impact on children.

The thesis contributes to the general knowledge about social supports and their delivery to divorcing families. The thesis gathers helpful information for the church, the mental health community, and the general helping professions about the availability of supports for children of divorce through local churches.

The thesis makes a contribution to the development of ministry with divorcing families in the Church of the Brethren. While Brethren statements on marriage and divorce call for ministry with children of divorce, there are no known official or informal programs in that direction. This was learned through correspondence between this author and Robert Faus, Consultant for Parish Ministries at the Church of the Brethren denominational offices in Elgin, Illinois.<sup>23</sup> However, to his knowledge this fact has never been documented. This thesis gathers useful initial information on ministry by Brethren congregations with

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<sup>23</sup>Robert Faus, letter to author, 21 April 1988.

children of divorce.

Finally, the thesis makes a contribution to all ministries for children in the Church of the Brethren. Since children and parents from both divorced and non-divorce homes have been contacted, the data provides useful information about the overall relationship between children and the Church of the Brethren, not only the relationship with children of divorce.

#### Limitations of the Thesis

There are a number of acknowledged limitations to this thesis. The survey findings are gathered only from one small denomination. While the results may be applicable to other churches and to children of divorce as a whole, that requires further verification. Also, any relationship with the church is inherently difficult to define. Some persons may have a significant level of contact with the church and gain little. Others may have minimal contact but gain great support and comfort from some aspect of their distant relationship with the church.

The thesis makes no attempt to examine the causes of divorce among Church of the Brethren adults. Though the Brethren have historically opposed divorce, there is an increased incidence of divorce among the membership of the church. While this is certainly an important issue to examine, this thesis does not explore this matter.

Also, the thesis makes no attempt to explore the influence of step-parenting or "blended" families on the relationship between children and the church. Such an additional focus, while important, would make the scope of the project unmanageable.

Several other limitations can be noted as well. Since the survey



methodology does not follow children over time, it cannot adequately document natural changes in the use of social supports due to changing circumstances--maturation of the child, normal drifting away from the church due to age, family moves, etc. Also, there is an inherent difficulty in interviewing children. While efforts were made to verify the accuracy of children's responses and minimize the effects of parental influence, some bias in the results is possible due to the young age of some of the children.

#### Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 is a three-part review of the literature on children of divorce. The first segment is a review of the general research literature which examines the nature of the divorce experience for children. Second is a review of two major groups of literature which attempt to outline theoretically the underlying reasons that divorce affects children. And, third, a review is given of the literature on therapy with children of divorce as a foundation for a more thorough understanding of the goals of social supports.

Chapter 3 is a three part discussion of children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren. First, there is a review of the theology of community as found in Church of the Brethren history and theology as a foundation for defining the Brethren as a social support for children of divorce. Second, a review of "official" Brethren statements on marriage and divorce is presented which indicates an increasing desire by the Brethren to be caring and helpful to divorcing families and children. Third, there is a review of the role of children in the Brethren faith community and a review of "official" Brethren statements

about ministry with children. The aforementioned works of Carter and Roop are crucial in this chapter and are reviewed in some detail.

Chapter 4 provides a necessary background to the research and survey methodology of the thesis. An initial segment of the chapter discusses the general literature on the use of social supports by persons in crises. This review highlights the efforts in existent research to empirically measure the use of social supports as a foundation for the survey methods of this thesis. In addition, this chapter contains a review of existent literature on the relationship between divorce and religious affiliation. Also, the chapter contains a brief review of the literature on the effects of parental religious affiliation on children's religious affiliation.

Chapter 5 reports the information gathered in the survey and begins a discussion of its implications. A particular effort is made to discuss the theology and practice of caregiving for children of divorce by a faith community.

Chapter 6 contains the general conclusions and implications of the thesis for ministry with children of divorce and for theories on divorce and social support. Suggestions for further research are also listed.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Divorce Experience of Children: A Review of the Literature

In the early stages of this thesis it is useful to answer several foundational questions: In what way does divorce impact children? Why does divorce impact children? Does divorce affect children in such a way that social supports are needed? Are there indications about the kinds of supports needed? And, is the central concern of the thesis, support by the church for children of divorce, a concern discussed at any other point in the literature?

A review of the literature on children of divorce is useful to answer these questions and to more fully describe children's experience with divorce. Accordingly, this chapter will review the literature in four sections: a general review of the research literature on children of divorce; a review of major theories about the underlying social and psychological effects of divorce on children; a brief review of the literature on therapy with children of divorce; and a review of the small amount of literature available on the church and children of divorce.

#### Divorce and Children

The literature generally agrees that divorce is emotionally and socially stressful for children, especially in the period immediately following parental separation. While some children experience prolonged difficulty, the majority are out of the "crisis" of divorce by about two

years. As examples, Mavis Hetherington and others found that at two months following divorce, preschool children were regressed in maturity of play and were more withdrawn from peers than were children from non-divorce homes. However, at two years the play and social patterns of children of divorce were once again similar to children from intact homes.<sup>1</sup> Hetherington and others also found that the crisis period was longer for boys than for girls.<sup>2</sup> Wallerstein and Kelly found that the majority of the children in their study were over the more intense crisis of divorce by about one year.<sup>3</sup> At one year, only fifteen percent of the children remained preoccupied and overwhelmed with the divorce.<sup>4</sup>

While the effects of divorce on children over a longer period of time are less dramatic and visible than in the immediate crisis, many researchers believe the effects are still significant. Wallerstein and Kelly describe divorce as a "chain of events"--emotional, social, psychological, and legal--which may last for several years.<sup>5</sup> In interviews with children ten years following parental separation, they found that one-quarter of the girls and one-half of the boys were still doing poorly in psychological and social functioning.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E. Mavis Hetherington, Martha Cox and Roger Cox, "Play and Social Interaction in Children Following Divorce," Journal of Social Issues 35 (Fall 1979): 37.

<sup>2</sup>Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 40.

<sup>3</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 162.

<sup>4</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 162-163.

<sup>5</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 4.

<sup>6</sup>Wallerstein, "Children ... Report of Ten-Year Follow-Up," 203.

Children's divorce-related distress can be seen in a variety of ways. Children of divorce appear in the population of mental health clinics at twice the rate of their appearance in the general population.<sup>7</sup> The cause of entry into the mental health system is predominately for treatment of aggressive and antisocial behavior--often aimed at parents.<sup>8</sup> Patrick Brady and others, in studies of mental health clinic populations, found that children of divorce were more likely to be treated for hyperactivity and sleep disturbances than were children from non-divorce families.<sup>9</sup> Children of divorce are also more likely to be reported as discipline problems in school, especially so for older boys.<sup>10</sup> Boys from divorced homes are seen to be more aggressive in play--in play groups and in isolated play.<sup>11</sup> Many children of divorce show a drop in academic performance in the period immediately following divorce. Again this is especially true of boys, but applies to girls as well.<sup>12</sup> Maureen Leahey concludes that studies of children's scholastic performance following divorce demonstrates

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<sup>7</sup>Neil Kalter, "Children of Divorce in an Outpatient Psychiatric Population," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 47 (Jan. 1977): 43.

<sup>8</sup>Kalter, 49.

<sup>9</sup>C.Patrick Brady, James H. Bray, and Linda Zeeb, "Behavior Problems of Clinic Children: Relation to Parental Marital Status, Age and Sex of Child," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 56 (July 1986): 408.

<sup>10</sup>Robert D. Felner, Arnold Stolberg and Emory L. Cowen, "Crisis Events and School Mental Health Referral Patterns of Young Children," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 43 (1975): 309.

<sup>11</sup>Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 38.

<sup>12</sup>Guldubaldi et al., 143.

that divorce has a "negative effect on children's cognitive development."<sup>13</sup> Reports from teachers suggest that even those children who maintain consistent levels of academic performance are still more tense and anxious in school than they were prior to the divorce.<sup>14</sup>

Signs of divorce-related distress appear in younger children as well. Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, observed pre-school children of divorce to be more dependent upon their adult supervisors and clung to them physically more than children from intact homes. In response to children's increased levels of anger and dependence, children of divorce were less well liked and were avoided by adult supervisors.<sup>15</sup>

Thomas Parish and Judy Dostal found that divorce has a negative impact on children's self-esteem. On a check-list of descriptive adjectives, children from non-divorce homes describe themselves and their parents in more positive ways than do children from divorced homes.<sup>16</sup> Also, Parish and Dostal found that when parents remarry, children's self-esteem is elevated. Children from remarried homes describe themselves and their parents in more positive terms than do children from divorced, single-parent homes.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Maureen Leahey, "Findings from Research on Divorce: Implications for Professionals' Skill Development," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 54 (April 1984): 302.

<sup>14</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 268.

<sup>15</sup>Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 41-2.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas S. Parish and Judy W. Dostal, "Evaluations of Self and Parent Figures by Children from Intact, Divorced, and Reconstituted Families," Journal of Youth and Adolescence 9 (1980): 350.

<sup>17</sup>Parish and Dostal, "Evaluations of Self," 350.

### Factors Affecting Children's Reactions to Divorce

Children's reactions to divorce are clearly influenced by factors such as age, sex, economic standing, geographic mobility, and ongoing relationships with both parents. In fact, as shall be cited, some studies conclude that such changes in family circumstances following divorce may have more impact on children than does the divorce.

Age. Wallerstein and Kelly found that while children have a wide variety of complex responses to divorce, the age of the child at the time of parental separation often led to similar reactions among children of the same age group. Children three to five years old react with intense fear--fear that they might lose both parents, not only the parent who has left.<sup>19</sup> Children six to eight years old show pervasive, inconsolable sadness.<sup>20</sup> Older school-age children, ages nine through twelve, have the appearance of poise and mastery of the divorce experience, which masks feelings of anger and depression internally.<sup>20</sup> Adolescents, ages thirteen to eighteen, experience profound loss and grief. To cope with their loss they move rapidly away from parental relationships toward independence, sometimes moving out of the parental home at an early age.<sup>21</sup>

Brady and others, in the study cited earlier of mental health clinic populations, also found age-group similarities in children's reactions to divorce. Children two to six years old had severe sleep

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<sup>19</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 57.

<sup>20</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 65.

<sup>20</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 71.

<sup>21</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 85-6.

disturbances, immature behavior and bowel problems.<sup>22</sup> Children seven to eleven were found to have problems with hyperactivity.<sup>23</sup> Older children, ages twelve to seventeen, had difficulty dealing with anxiety, physical illnesses, were caught stealing, and had sibling problems.<sup>24</sup>

Most research supports the conclusion that younger children are more troubled by divorce than older children and adolescents. Wallerstein and Kelly found that boys between eight and eleven years old at the time of the divorce are more likely to be emotionally and behaviorally troubled than are older children.<sup>25</sup> Judith Desimone-Luis and others, in a study of maladaptive behavior in children of divorce, found that children between six and nine years of age have higher levels of maladaptive behavior than do children of divorce in any other age group.<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Kurdek and Albert Slesky found that younger children are more likely to harbor hopes and fantasies of parental reconciliation than are older children.<sup>27</sup> In a separate study, Kurdek and Slesky found that younger children blame themselves more for the divorce and have less awareness of the marital instabilities which led to the divorce than do older children. This study concluded that the

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<sup>22</sup>Brady, Bray, and Zeeb, 409.

<sup>23</sup>Brady, Bray, and Zeeb, 409.

<sup>24</sup>Brady, Bray, and Zeeb, 409.

<sup>25</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 202.

<sup>26</sup>Judith Desimone-Luis, Katherine O'Mahoney and Dennis Hunt, "Children of Separation and Divorce: Factors Influencing Adjustment, Journal of Divorce 3 (Fall 1979): 40.

<sup>27</sup>Kurdek and Slesky, "An Interview Study," 12.



development of "internal control" and more sophisticated "interpersonal knowledge," which develop only with advancing age, are the key factors of age related reactions to divorce.<sup>28</sup>

Sexual gender. As has been mentioned at several points, boys appear to have more intense and sustained reactions to divorce than do girls. Wallerstein and Kelly found that at one and one-half years following parental separation, boys were more stressed and preoccupied with the divorce than were girls. Boys also showed significantly more grief over the loss of their father from the home than did girls.<sup>29</sup> Hetherington and others found that disruptions to play are much more intense and enduring in boys than in girls.<sup>30</sup> Brady and others also found that boys have more behavior problems, hyperactivity and sibling rivalry, while girls have more sleep disturbances.<sup>31</sup> John Santrock found that boys from divorced homes are rated by teachers as more morally deviant and disobedient, but are more advanced in moral reasoning, based on Kohlberg's scales of moral reasoning, than boys from homes with father-absence due to death.<sup>32</sup> In another study, Santrock found that boys from divorced homes are judged to be more aggressive in "doll play," are rated as more masculine and independent by teachers, while at the same time are rated as more obedient in the classroom

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<sup>28</sup>Lawrence A. Kurdek and Albert E. Slesky, "Children's Perceptions of Their Parent's Divorce," Journal of Divorce 3 (Summer 1980): 375.

<sup>29</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 165.

<sup>30</sup>Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 37-8.

<sup>31</sup>Brady, Bray, and Zeeb, 409-10.

<sup>32</sup>John W. Santrock, "Father Absence, Perceived Maternal Behavior and Moral Development in Boys," Child Development 46 (1975): 753.

setting.<sup>33</sup> Kay Tooley suggests that the troubled mother-son relationship following divorce may be a result of the pressure, albeit unspoken, for the son to be the "man-of-the-house" and take the role of the absent father. Tooley suggests that antisocial behavior in boys may be a disguised cry for help for the entire family.<sup>34</sup>

Economic factors. Desimone-Luis and others found that lessened family income following divorce is the most accurate predictor of maladaptive behavior in children of divorce. Of the children in her study who were judged to exhibit maladaptive behavior, each was from a home which experienced at least a fifty percent drop in income immediately following parental separation.<sup>35</sup> Colletta believes that a drop in income following divorce has a negative impact on parenting effectiveness, which in turn affects children's well-being. Loss of income due to divorce often results in a mother returning to work or school. Recently divorced mothers may have less time and emotional composure for parenting tasks.<sup>36</sup> William Hodges and others, in another study of maladjustment in children, found that divorce itself is not a predictor of maladjustment. However, if the parents are young when they divorce, if the family moves frequently as a result of divorce,

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<sup>33</sup>John W. Santrock, "Effects of Father Absence on Sex-Typed Behaviors in Male Children: Reason for the Absence and Age of Onset of the Absence," Journal of Genetic Psychology 130 (1977): 3.

<sup>34</sup>Kay Tooley, "Antisocial Behavior and Social Alienation Post Divorce: The 'Man of the House' and His Mother," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 46 (Jan. 1976), 41.

<sup>35</sup>Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney, and Hunt, 40.

<sup>36</sup>Nancy Donohue Colletta, "The Impact of Divorce: Father Absence or Poverty," Journal of Divorce 3 (Fall 1979): 33.

and if there is a significant drop in family income following divorce, then maladjustments will appear in children.<sup>37</sup>

Relationships with parents. Children's adjustment to divorce is also influenced by the quality of the parental oversight they experience in the post-divorce family. In some families divorce means lessened parental supervision and interaction with children. Hetherington noted that divorce creates a "chaotic life style" for some families, due in part to increased demands on the custodial parent. Lack of attention from parents, erratic meals, inconsistent bedtimes, and tardiness often are familiar features of divorced homes. Disorganized routines such as these create feelings of loneliness and uncertainty in children.<sup>38</sup> Wallerstein and Kelly found that one-half of the custodial mothers in their study had difficulty carrying-out common parental tasks such as rule setting, discipline and establishment of family routines in the first year following divorce.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the harmful effects of lessened parental supervision, a generally poor relationship with parents following divorce appears to cause turmoil for children. Unfortunately, conflicted post-divorce relationships between parents and children are quite common. Wallerstein and Kelly found increased tension, increased anger, lack of trust, and lack of cooperation between mothers and

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<sup>37</sup>William F. Hodges, Ralph C. Wechsler, and Constance Ballantine, "Divorce and the Preschool Child: Cumulative Stress," Journal of Divorce 3 (Fall 1979): 63.

<sup>38</sup>E. Mavis Hetherington, "Divorce: A Child's Perspective," American Psychologist 34 (Oct. 1979): 854.

<sup>39</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 111.

children, especially between mothers and sons, in two-thirds of the divorced families in their study.<sup>40</sup> Robert Hess and Kathleen Camara found increased levels of social maladaptation in children of divorce who were in conflicted relationships with parents.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, those children who experience positive relationships with parents following divorce show lower levels of aggression and other forms of social misbehavior.<sup>42</sup> Hess and Camara write, "Apparently, it is the quality of relationship between the child and parents that is most crucial in divorced families."<sup>43</sup> Guidubaldi and others found that children of divorce who had positive relationships with both the custodial and non-custodial parent have better communication skills, higher academic performances and higher overall adjustment ratings.<sup>44</sup> They also found that children's perceptions of their relationship with the non-custodial parent are directly related to the amount of visitation they have with them.<sup>45</sup> Thomas Parish and Gerald Nunn found that in divorced homes, the child's image of the parents is a strong predictor of independence or dependence in children; negative images of parents creates increased

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<sup>40</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 109.

<sup>41</sup>Robert D. Hess and Kathleen A. Camara, "Post-Divorce Family Relationships as Mediating Factors in the Consequences of Divorce for Children," Journal of Social Issues 35 (Fall 1979): 89.

<sup>42</sup>Hess and Camara, 91-2.

<sup>43</sup>Hess and Camara, 92.

<sup>44</sup>Guidubaldi, et al., 144.

<sup>45</sup>Guidubaldi, et al., 145.

dependencies in children.<sup>44</sup>

Not only do positive relationships between children and parents enhance children's post-divorce adjustments, but an avoidance of conflict between the ex-spouses when children are present is helpful as well. Helen Raschke and Vernon Raschke found adverse effects on children's self-concept when they witness fighting between parents.<sup>47</sup> Guidubaldi and others found a direct relationship between a decrease in the conflict level of ex-spouses and an improvement in the overall adjustment of children of divorce. This is especially true of older children and markedly true for older boys.<sup>48</sup>

On a more hopeful note, some research suggests that though children's relationships with parents are often troubled following divorce, some factors can lessen the difficulty. Aral Rosenthal found that children's grief over the loss of a relationship, or a troubled relationship, with one parent can be greatly mitigated by a positive relationship with the remaining parent.<sup>49</sup> Sharyn Crossman and Gerald Adams found that supportive, crisis intervention counseling can enable the parenting skills of divorced mothers to remain consistent and

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas S. Parish and Gerald D. Nunn, "Children's Self-Concepts and Evaluations of Parents as a Function of Family Structure and Process," Journal of Psychology 107 (1981): 105.

<sup>47</sup> Helen J. Raschke and Vernon J. Raschke, "Family Conflict and Children's Self-Concepts: A Comparison of Intact and Single-Parent Families," Journal of Marriage and the Family 41 (May 1979): 372.

<sup>48</sup> Guidubaldi, et al., 145.

<sup>49</sup> Perlhan Aral Rosenthal, "Sudden Disappearance of One Parent with Separation and Divorce: The Grief and Treatment of Preschool Children," Journal of Divorce 3 (Fall 1979): 53.

adequate.<sup>50</sup> And, Wallerstein and Kelly found that many custodial mothers naturally reattain effective parenting abilities at about one year following divorce.<sup>51</sup>

#### Divorce and the Extended Family Network

Not only does divorce result in the breakup of the nuclear family, it often results in the breakup of the extended kinship network as well. Jerry Spicer and Gary Hampe found that divorced adults, especially men, have greatly diminished contact with the extended family of their ex-spouse.<sup>52</sup> While this is to be expected, the lessened contact may also effect children's involvement with extended family. Donald Anspach found that children's contact with their father's kinship network usually diminishes following divorce.<sup>53</sup> Anspach also found that when custodial mothers remarry, children's contact with their natural father's kinship network diminishes even further.<sup>54</sup> However, Anspach did find that when fathers shared custody or maintained regular visitation, children were more likely to have continued contact with their paternal kinship network.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Sharyn M. Crossman and Gerald R. Adams, "Divorce, Single Parenting and Child Development," Journal of Psychology 106 (1980): 214.

<sup>51</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 120.

<sup>52</sup>Jerry W. Spicer and Gary D. Hampe, "Kinship Interaction After Divorce," Journal of Marriage and the Family 37 (Feb. 1975): 118.

<sup>53</sup>Donald F. Anspach, "Kinship and Divorce," Journal of Marriage and the Family 38 (May 1976): 328.

<sup>54</sup>Anspach, 328.

<sup>55</sup>Anspach, 328-29.

### The Long-range Effects of Divorce

The long-range effects of parental divorce during childhood on adult functioning are uncertain. Hallowell Pope and Charles Mueller found some evidence of a higher divorce rate among adult children of divorce, though not to the level of statistical significance.<sup>56</sup> In a separate study, Muller and Pope found that some adult children of divorce marry younger and marry partners with lower levels of education and economic stability, leading to a slightly higher divorce rate. However, when educational and economic factors are controlled, the divorce rate of adult children of divorce is the same as the divorce rate of the general population.<sup>57</sup>

Adult children of divorce do report periods of marital discord in their own marriages at much higher rates than do children from non-divorce families of origin. However, they also report marital happiness and satisfaction at a much higher rate.<sup>58</sup> One possible explanation is that because of their experience with parental divorce, adult children of divorce may be more honest and realistic about the ebbs and flows of marriage and view conflict as normal.<sup>59</sup>

Many adult children of divorce believe that parental divorce has

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<sup>56</sup>Hallowell Pope and Charles W. Mueller, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Marital Instability: Comparisons by Race and Sex," Journal of Social Issues 32 (1976): 60.

<sup>57</sup>Charles W. Mueller and Hallowell Pope, "Marital Instability: A Study of Its Transmission Between Generations," Journal of Marriage and the Family 39 (Feb. 1977): 91.

<sup>58</sup>Richard A. Kulka and Helen Weingarten, "The Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce in Childhood on Adult Adjustment," Journal of Social Issues 35 (Fall 1979): 71.

<sup>59</sup>Kulka and Weingarten, 69.

had long-lasting effects on them. Adult children of divorce report that their childhood years were the most unhappy years of their lives at a much higher rate than do adults from non-divorce homes.<sup>60</sup> They also report feeling that as adults they have been close to a "nervous breakdown," or have anxiety, at higher rates than do adults from non-divorce homes. Reports of anxiety or unhappiness are found more among men than women, adding support to the conclusion that divorce is a more difficult experience for men than for women, both immediately following divorce and over time.<sup>61</sup>

In contrast to these subjective self-reports, those studies which use objective psychological and personality tests to measure such factors as ego development, ego strength, self-esteem, and self-identity, find no measurable differences between adults from divorced families-of-origin and adults from non-divorce families-of-origin.<sup>62</sup> In fact, Crossman and others conclude that parental divorce during childhood may lead to enhanced coping skills, problem-solving abilities, and resultant strengthened ego-development in

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<sup>60</sup>Kulka and Weingarten, 56.

<sup>61</sup>Kulka and Weingarten, 72.

<sup>62</sup>Sharyn M. Crossman, Judy Ann Shea and Gerald R. Adams, "Effects of Parental Divorce During Early Childhood on Ego Development and Identity Formation of College Students," Journal of Divorce 3 (Spring 1980): 263.

Howard B. Kaplan and Alex D. Pokorny, "Self-Derogation and Childhood Broken Home," Journal of Marriage and the Family 41 (1971): 328.

Kenneth L. Wilson et al., "Stepfathers and Stepchildren: An Exploratory Analysis from Two National Surveys," Journal of Marriage and the Family 37 (1975): 526.



adulthood.<sup>33</sup>

While the measurable effects of divorce appear to be minimal in adults whose parents divorced, divorce does appear to be a hallmark or central event in their awareness for the remainder of their lives. Kulka and Weingarten believe that the divorce becomes a central metaphor, through which self-identity and all subsequent life events are interpreted. In the instance of marriage, for example, adult children of divorce tend to enter marriage more cognizant of its fragility, less dependent upon marriage for happiness, and less invested in marital and parental roles.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, at the outset of this chapter several initial questions were asked. Among them were: Does divorce have an impact on children? And, if so, what kind of impact does it have? The answer appears to be that divorce is a significant crisis in children's lives. Though the effects are eased by time, divorce has a major impact on the emotional well-being and social stability of children in the period immediately following parental separation. Also, for some children, divorce is more troubling and the impact may be felt for many years. Boys appear to be more adversely affected by divorce than girls and younger children more than older children. Research literature suggests that social and economic factors determine much of the impact of divorce on children. Divorce is often followed by a loss of family income, changes in residence, decreased availability of parents, and loss of contact with some segments of the extended family network. The effects of divorce

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<sup>33</sup>Crossman, Shea, and Adams, 263.

<sup>34</sup>Kulka and Weingarten, 58.

are seen in children in increased aggressiveness, depression, grief, anger, and a drop in school performance. An ongoing, positive relationship with both parents can be helpful to children of divorce as is the absence of conflict between the ex-spouses. Divorce appears to effect children subjectively, even into adult life, with divorce becoming a central event in their perception of their lives.

In essence, divorce appears to set off a series of events which disorganize the child's life, especially the relationship with his or her parents and the familiar routines of life--living arrangements, schools, friendships, etc. Any supportive efforts by an institution such as the church which are aimed at minimizing the disorganizing effects of divorce would appear to be appropriate and useful. Though supports would be made available for all children, boys and younger children might be a primary focus. Support might come in the form of financial aid to minimize economic disruptions, day care, transportation, housing, etc. Supports might also be provided to facilitate needed communication and contact among all the members of the family network. This might be an especially appropriate area of intervention for a church congregation which may have contact with various members of the social and kinship networks.

However, while social supports initially appear to be appropriate for children of divorce, some intriguing questions remain unanswered. Are there any clues about the reasons that divorce impacts children? If so, are social supports going to simply ease a difficult situation, comforting children in a troubling crisis, or, can supportive interventions actually lessen the impact of divorce? To answer these

questions a review of the literature which develops a theoretical basis for understanding the effects of divorce on children will be useful. This literature will help define further the nature of the divorce experience for children and will help focus the goals of social supports.

### Theories of Divorce

In this author's view, the literature which develops a theoretical base for understanding the impact of divorce on children can be divided into two groups. One group is titled by this author the "intrapsychic" theory. This literature looks at the psychological and developmental processes of the individual child, and their interruption because of divorce, as the location of the pathological effects of divorce on children. The other group of literature is titled by this author the "social" theory. This body of literature looks at interpersonal and economic changes associated with divorce, believing that the social disorganization following divorce is the reason that divorce is difficult for some children. Though neither term is found in the literature, nor is there a thorough discussion of them, they are used here to gain a perspective on the theoretical issues surrounding divorce and children.

### The Intrapsychic Theory

Much of this literature is grounded in psychoanalytic or psychodynamic personality theory. Lora Helms Tessman, using classic psychoanalytic theory, pinpoints the child's identification with parents in the development of his or her ego, or personality structure, as

crucial in the child's reaction to divorce.<sup>65</sup> Tessman believes that the predominant emotional activity of children of divorce is an increased identification with the absent parent as a means of maintaining a relationship with them in their absence.<sup>66</sup> An emotional dilemma is created as the child wants to identify with both parents and cannot emotionally "give up" love for either. Depression and anger appears in the child whose parents are deeply divided and whose love for the child appears to be conditioned upon the child giving up the other parent.<sup>67</sup> The child of divorce often creates an "ego ideal," or fantasized perfect parent, in place of the absent parent. This "ideal" is either rejected because of their abandonment of the child, or imitated as a way of emotionally fusing with the parent in their absence.<sup>68</sup> The child's normal developmental process is interrupted unless the ego-ideal is given up in favor of the child's own emerging ego. However, this is an especially difficult task for the child who is already experiencing feelings of loss because of divorce.<sup>69</sup> The emotional reactions of children of divorce are interpreted by Tessman as longing for the absent parent or grief in "giving up" hope for their return.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Lora Helms Tessman, Children of Parting Parents (New York: Aronson, 1978), 42.

<sup>66</sup>Tessman, 80.

<sup>67</sup>Tessman, 83.

<sup>68</sup>Tessman, 84.

<sup>69</sup>Tessman, 87.

<sup>70</sup>Tessman, 131.

Richard Gardner also believes that the trauma of divorce for children grows out of the loss of the parent in the identification process of ego development.<sup>71</sup> He sees the relationship with both the same-sex and opposite-sex parent as crucial to ego development. The same-sex parent is important in identification and gender related modeling. The opposite-sex parent serves as a role model for learning effective interpersonal relationships with opposite-sex peers.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, in divorce the child may lose contact with one parent figure. While Gardner does not believe that divorce inevitably produces psychopathology in children, he does believe that children of divorce are more likely to develop pathological symptoms than are children from intact homes.<sup>73</sup> He believes this is true because of the parental conflicts that often precede divorce. Children of divorce often have greater exposure to traumatic events over longer periods of time than do children from intact homes.<sup>74</sup> Also, due to a naturally lessened availability to children of single parents, children of divorce are more likely to be frustrated and have feelings of deprivation in parental relationships than are children from intact homes.<sup>75</sup>

Wallerstein and Kelly also refer to the identification process in the child's development of ego to explain age-related variations in

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<sup>71</sup>Richard A. Gardner, Psychotherapy With Children of Divorce (New York: Aronson, 1976), 40.

<sup>72</sup>Gardner, 40.

<sup>73</sup>Gardner, 39.

<sup>74</sup>Gardner, 39.

<sup>75</sup>Gardner, 40.

children's reactions to divorce.<sup>76</sup> They believe that older children whose ego development is more advanced, have more psychological and social coping skills to face the changes and stresses of divorce. In particular, Wallerstein and Kelly were drawn to the difference in reactions to divorce of children six to eight years old and children nine to twelve years old. Children nine to twelve showed more poise and courage than did younger children.<sup>77</sup> Wallerstein and Kelly theorize that at about the age of eight or nine, children make a major stride in ego development toward autonomy, explaining the more rapid adjustment to divorce of older children.<sup>78</sup> They also note that in younger boys, age six to eight, the Oedipal conflict is exacerbated by the sudden absence of the father figure and the often increased closeness and conflict that appears in the relationship with mother.<sup>79</sup> They feel this helps to explain the increased difficulty often seen in boys. There was no corresponding discussion found by this author of girls' responses when fathers are the primary custodial or care-giving parent.

In the intrapsychic approach the focus is on the child's emotional processes and the effects of a disrupted parental relationship on personality development. This view of divorce has a number of strong points: it is founded in well-accepted, traditional personality theory; it accounts for variations in children's reactions to divorce within the same families by focusing on the age-related emotional process of

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<sup>76</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 71.

<sup>77</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 71.

<sup>78</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 71.

<sup>79</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 69.

the individual child rather than on family circumstances; it accounts well for the similar reactions of same-age children from various family and cultural backgrounds; and because of its strong theoretical base it offers clear directions for psychotherapy with children of divorce.

However, this approach has a number of weaknesses. One is an inability to account for varied reactions in children of the same age groups. Children of similar stages of ego-development, with identical relationships to parents, often react to divorce quite differently. Wallerstein refers to this issue at one point, and contradicts her own emphasis on internal emotional processes, by noting that such things as the child's role in the family, sibling position, or the presence of conflict in the family must be taken into account to fully understand a particular child's reaction to divorce.<sup>80</sup>

Also, a major point of criticism in the literature of the intrapsychic approach is that the pathological or conflictive nature of divorce is more often emphasized. Leahey, for one, is critical of the psychodynamic approach and of Wallerstein and Kelly in particular because of this emphasis. Leahey notes that since the underlying paradigm of psychodynamic theory is one of unresolved conflict, it is only natural that theorists from this approach would find and perhaps overemphasize any unresolved conflicts in children of divorce.<sup>81</sup> In addition, this approach does not appear to account for the generally positive adjustment of most children to divorce.

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<sup>80</sup>Judith S. Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce: The Psychological Tasks of the Child," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 53 (April 1983): 232.

<sup>81</sup>Leahey, 307.

In the intrapsychic approach, the traditional, nuclear family is the ideal or normative family form with little acknowledgment of various other family forms as equally acceptable milieus for normal child development. As an example, in the crucial area of the child's personality development through identification with parent figures, sources can be cited which suggest that children's identification with parents may continue uninterrupted following divorce. Thomas Parish and Judy Dostal found that children of divorce identify significantly with both mother and father following divorce, even though the father may not be living in the child's home. In addition, when step-parents enter the child's family, the child is able to form identifications with them as well. The child readily identifies with step-parents, especially when birth-fathers are absent. Parish and Dostal found that children of divorce are able to substitute objects of identification.<sup>82</sup> In another interesting example, Wallerstein and Kelly, again in contrast to their concern with the interruption of ego development through loss of the parent, note that many children actually experience an improvement in their relationships with parents following divorce. When conflicts and tensions ease between ex-spouses, the parents seem able to be more attentive and nurturing of children.<sup>83</sup> It is unclear to this author why children's identification processes would be interrupted through divorce to the point of pathology if children are able to identify with a number of available adult figures and if

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<sup>82</sup>Thomas S. Parish and Judy W. Dostal, "Relationships Between Evaluations of Self and Parents by Children from Intact and Divorced Families," Journal of Psychology 104 (1980): 37.

<sup>83</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 104-5.



relationships with parents may function in an improved fashion following divorce.

### The Social Theory

The social view of divorce dominates the most recently published literature and offers a sharp contrast to the intrapsychic approach. Much of this approach appears to be based in sociology or social psychology theory. In this view, divorce is a process of social disorganization with significant disruptions in the family's economic stability and familiar relational network. The effects of divorce on children are a result of the disruptions in relationships and life patterns--patterns of income, housing, schooling, etc.

Some theorists in this approach work from a "family systems" point of view. Edward Beal, working with the theories of Murray Bowen, interprets divorce in light of its effect on the "emotional attachments" between family members.<sup>84</sup> Emotional attachments, called the "cornerstone" of Bowen's theories, are defined as the emotional influence any two persons have on one another.<sup>85</sup> Every relationship, or system of relationships such as a family, develops a balance or consistent level of emotional attachment on a continuum between two possible extremes--complete fusion of persons or complete autonomy.<sup>86</sup> Any change or stress on relationships causes change in their emotional balance. Marriage, births of children, divorce, deaths, and so on, are

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<sup>84</sup>Edward W. Beal, "Children of Divorce: A Family Systems Perspective," Journal of Social Issues 35 (Fall 1979): 140.

<sup>85</sup>Beal, "Children of Divorce," 140.

<sup>86</sup>Beal, "Children of Divorce," 141-42.

all seen as stressful to relationships and families and they all bring about periods of disequilibrium and subsequent establishment of new emotional attachments.<sup>87</sup>

Divorce is not inherently a pathological event, but rather an event of change and stress.<sup>88</sup> Beal believes that divorce may produce emotional difficulties in children because stress in relationships generally increases the intensity of the emotional attachment, usually resulting in increased emotional fusion between persons.<sup>89</sup> Emotional problems arise for some children of divorce when parents cope with their own divorce-related emotional anxiety by over-attachment with one or more of their children.<sup>90</sup> When this happens the child who is emotionally fused with his or her parents may be unable to develop appropriate levels of age-related independence.<sup>91</sup>

Another example of the social theory of divorce is that of Salvador Minuchin. Minuchin describes his overall theoretical approach as "Structural Family Therapy," or a therapeutic orientation which views the individual in their social context.<sup>92</sup> Minuchin disagrees with the intrapsychic view of divorce, citing the work of Wallerstein and Kelly specifically. He believes that the intrapsychic approach mistakenly

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<sup>87</sup>Beal, "Children of Divorce," 141.

<sup>88</sup>Beal, "Children of Divorce," 141.

<sup>89</sup>Beal, "Children of Divorce," 142.

<sup>90</sup>Beal, "Children of Divorce," 143.

<sup>91</sup>Beal, "Children of Divorce," 143-44.

<sup>92</sup>Salvador Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 2.

defines children's reactions to divorce as pathological responses.<sup>93</sup>

Minuchin views divorce as a transitional event, similar to other developmental changes in families--marriage, birth of children, deaths, etc.<sup>94</sup> Changes and transitions cause familiar relational patterns to be inadequate to meet the new demands on the family. The birth of a child, for example, calls for changes in the spousal relationship. Minuchin believes that family relational patterns continually change and evolve toward increasingly complex relational patterns.<sup>95</sup> Each point of transition contains the possibilities for dysfunctional responses or for growth, depending upon the family's flexibility in accepting new relational patterns.<sup>96</sup> Family members may exhibit dysfunctional symptoms if the changes brought on by divorce are unacceptable and they fail to adapt to new, post-divorce relational patterns.<sup>97</sup> However, no single event inherently contains greater possibilities for dysfunction than does any other life-change event.

Minuchin points out that two essential tasks are performed in a family--support of each member's growth toward individuality and providing a context for each member's sense of belonging.<sup>98</sup> He believes that a wide variety of family forms may successfully accomplish these

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<sup>93</sup>Salvador Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope: Images of Violence and Healing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 46.

<sup>94</sup>Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy, 63-5.

<sup>95</sup>Salvador Minuchin and H. Charles Fishman, Family Therapy Techniques (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 81.

<sup>96</sup>Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy, 60.

<sup>97</sup>Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope, 45.

<sup>98</sup>Minuchin and Fishman, 11.

tasks. Minuchin notes that the two-parent nuclear family is a rather recent cultural phenomenon, with larger, extended families as the more historic norm. To label the single-parent, divorced family as a deviant family form, conducive to pathology in children, is inaccurate, as a variety of family forms can accomplish family tasks.<sup>99</sup>

Minuchin offers a unique view of individual and social growth which is helpful for understanding divorce. He believes that individuals and families grow through change and disorganization. In the psychodynamic approach, growth occurs through conflict resolution. In Minuchin's view, growth occurs through the conflict.<sup>100</sup> An often-used therapeutic technique for Minuchin is to encourage a crisis or transition in family relationships, to set the stage for reorganization.<sup>101</sup> Perhaps his most helpful insight to the divorce experience is to highlight the possibility for growth and positive change through divorce.<sup>102</sup>

Yet another body of literature within the social approach views the effects of divorce as a result of economic and demographic factors. Desimone-Luis and others, in a study cited earlier of maladjustment in children of divorce, found that all the children in their study who were judged to be maladjusted had experienced a fifty percent or more drop in family income immediately following the divorce.<sup>103</sup> In

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<sup>99</sup>Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope, 46.

<sup>100</sup>Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope, 42.

<sup>101</sup>Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy, 111.

<sup>102</sup>Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope, 42.

<sup>103</sup>Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney, and Hunt, 40.

addition, all the maladjusted children were between the ages of six and nine at the time of the separation.<sup>104</sup> The authors suggest that children at this age are particularly vulnerable to the consequences and changes in family life due to loss of income--change in housing, entertainment, social status, diet, etc.<sup>105</sup> Hodges and others support this conclusion. They found that maladjustment in children of divorce was predicted by younger parents, limited financial resources and geographic mobility, while these factors did not predict maladjustment in children from intact homes.<sup>106</sup>

The strength of the social view appears to be its definition of divorce as a normal life event and a de-emphasis of divorce as a pathological event. This approach has a stronger sense of hopefulness for families who experience divorce because the moral values surrounding divorce are redefined; divorce is no longer wrongdoing or disruption of "normal" family structures, rather it is a common life transition undertaken in an effort to move toward more functional living.

Also, the social view gives helping professionals, social service agencies, and churches clear and concrete directions for supporting divorcing families. Since the effects of divorce on children are seen to be a result of post-divorce family relationships and economics, concrete efforts to reduce the disruptive effects of divorce can be invaluable and can be seen as a reduction in the trauma produced by

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<sup>104</sup>Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney, and Hunt, 40.

<sup>105</sup>Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney, and Hunt, 41.

<sup>106</sup>Hodges, Wechsler, and Ballantine, 55.

divorce. The Family Systems theory base of this approach encourages supportive interventions for entire family groups, including children, and not simply for the divorcing couple.

The primary weakness of the social approach appears to be its somewhat unrealistic view of post-divorce family functioning. This approach attributes difficulties in divorcing families to the inability to accept new relationships and family forms. In fact, relationships in post-divorce families are conflicted and troubled. Divorce is caused by intense disappointments and conflicts. New, post-divorce relationships and family forms are often completely unacceptable to some family members--adults and children alike. To suggest that families may simply be able to be more accepting of life in the post-divorce family may be an overly optimistic denial of the basic, conflictive nature of most divorces.

In summary, these two theoretical approaches offer contrasting views of potential involvement by a local church congregation in the lives of children of divorce. The intrapsychic approach offers fewer available avenues of support by a congregation. The primary procedure for interventions with children of divorce in the intrapsychic approach appears to be individually oriented psychotherapy to facilitate a healing of the emotional processes of the child. Though this approach recognizes the importance of social supports for children, these seem peripheral to the more central task of psychotherapy. Tessman, for example, acknowledges the crucial role of social supports for children of divorce, but only briefly before moving to the issue of

psychotherapy with children, the focus of the vast bulk of her work.<sup>107</sup> Since few congregations would likely be equipped to offer such therapy, referral to qualified helping professionals would appear to be the greatest help the church could offer.

On the other hand, the social theory of divorce appears to encourage a more direct involvement by the church. If divorce is seen as a process of interpersonal and economic disorganization--in the family, the extended social network, financially, etc.--then efforts by the church to minimize the disorganization are extremely useful. The church may be able to play a role as a source of stability and familiarity for the child during the entire divorcing process. Supports such as financial aid, day care, transportation, and friendships are crucial to minimize the disruptive effects of divorce. Rather than simply easing the child's adjustment, this approach suggests that the impact of divorce may be lessened.

One further source of assistance in understanding the role of the church with children of divorce is a discussion of the literature on therapy with divorcing persons and families. As can be seen in brief glimpses thus far, much of the theoretical discussions on divorce come from sources predominately concerned with therapy, for the individual and the family. A review of this literature, using the distinctions between the intrapsychic and social theories of divorce, is in order at this point.

#### Children of Divorce and Therapy

The stages in children's adjustment to divorce are summarized by

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<sup>107</sup>Tessman, 36-7.

Wallerstein as she lists the psychological "tasks" facing children in the years following divorce.<sup>108</sup> In the first year the child needs to acknowledge the reality of the divorce, disengage from parental conflict and resume customary interests and pursuits.<sup>109</sup> The next tasks, normally accomplished over a several year period, are the resolution of loss, resolving anger and self-blame, and accepting the permanence of the divorce.<sup>110</sup> Finally, in late adolescence and early adult years, the child achieves a realistic sense of hope regarding the success of their own romantic relationships and marriage.<sup>111</sup>

Neil Kalter and others acknowledged Wallerstein's list and add five more "challenges" which the child must face as a result of "post-divorce living."<sup>112</sup> They are: (1) coping with ongoing parental disharmony, (2) adapting to repetitive separation from each parent due to visiting and custody arrangements, (3) developing a realistic understanding of possible changes in custody and visitation, (4) coming to terms with the sexual dynamics in the post-divorce family as a result of mother's and father's new dating activities, and (5) adapting to step-parents.<sup>113</sup>

Both of these articles emphasize the view that adjustment to

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<sup>108</sup>Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce: Psychological Tasks," 230.

<sup>109</sup>Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce: Psychological Tasks," 233.

<sup>110</sup>Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce: Psychological Tasks," 233.

<sup>111</sup>Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce: Psychological Tasks," 233.

<sup>112</sup>Neil Kalter, Jeffrey Pickar and Marsha Lesowitz, "School-Based Developmental Facilitation Groups for Children of Divorce: A Preventive Intervention," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 54 (Oct. 1984): 613.

<sup>113</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 622.



divorce takes place over an extended period of time, in fact, over several years. Thus, supportive care for children should be provided on an ongoing basis and not simply in the period immediately following the divorce. Kalter and others acknowledge that while a "crisis model" of care for children of divorce is useful as an early intervention, a long-term model of care is important as well.<sup>114</sup> In fact, Kalter and others propose that support be available for children of divorce at all the normal "developmental points" in the child's life--entry to school, early adolescence, high school graduation, etc.<sup>115</sup> At such "nodal" points the stress and strains of previous experiences such as divorce "resurface" and call for renewed supportive interventions.<sup>116</sup> Lillian Messinger and Kenneth Walker share a similar view that therapy with children of divorce should be based on a "life-cycle" model of the total divorce-remarriage process, which includes supporting the child and his or her family during such stages as separation, divorce, single-parenting, remarriage, and step-parenting.<sup>117</sup> Messinger and Walker believe that at each stage of the divorce-remarriage process, the focus of helping interventions should be to facilitate effective parenting by the divorcing couple; each stage calling for adjustments in parenting style.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 614.

<sup>115</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 614.

<sup>116</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 614.

<sup>117</sup>Lillian Messinger and Kenneth N. Walker, "From Marriage Breakdown to Remarriage: Parental Tasks and Therapeutic Guidelines," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 51 (July 1981): 429

<sup>118</sup>Messinger and Walker, 430.

### The Intrapsychic Theory of Therapy with Children of Divorce

In the intrapsychic view, Tessman suggests that psychotherapy with children of divorce resembles traditional psychodynamic psychotherapy. Her therapeutic intent with children of divorce is to explore the emotional responses of children, with a specific focus on exploring "intrapsychic links" between children's identity and their feelings of loss and grief over the departed parent.<sup>119</sup> Tessman believes that when working with children of divorce, the therapist takes a more active role than is traditional in analytic psychotherapy in order to focus on the child's feelings and confront their disappointment in parental figures.<sup>120</sup> Tessman believes, however, that the therapist should not become a surrogate parent figure as that would circumvent the child's need to grieve the loss of a significant adult figure. The therapist should remain more emotionally distant from the child.<sup>121</sup>

Also in an intrapsychic view, Gardner describes psychotherapy with children of divorce as similar to traditional psychodynamic psychotherapy, with a few non-traditional techniques.<sup>122</sup> Gardner uses storytelling, games, puppets, plays, and other childlike play, to facilitate unconscious healing in the child. He believes that traditional cognitive insights are not especially useful with children.<sup>123</sup> Instead, the goal of therapy with children of divorce,

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<sup>119</sup>Tessman, 529.

<sup>120</sup>Tessman, 531.

<sup>121</sup>Tessman, 533-34.

<sup>122</sup>Gardner, 51.

<sup>123</sup>Gardner, 57-8.

according to Gardner, is to communicate insight to the unconscious mind of the child to aid in the process of resolving grief and anxiety over the loss of an important love object--the parent.<sup>124</sup>

Interestingly, both of these authors acknowledge the importance of the social network as a healing force with children of divorce. Tessman notes that the first task in working with children of divorce, even before psychotherapy begins, is to strengthen the child's support network.<sup>125</sup> She believes that a supportive social network is often needed more by the child than is therapy.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, Gardner acknowledges departing from traditional, individual psychodynamic therapy by including the parents in the therapy experience, as observers and participants.<sup>127</sup>

#### The Social Theory of Therapy with Children of Divorce

The social view again offers a contrast to the intrapsychic view of therapy. Stuart Kaplan, using the Structural Family Therapy approach of Salvador Minuchin, believes that the strategy of the therapist is to work with divorcing families as a whole, specifically those relationships within the family network which seem to be most stressful for the child.<sup>128</sup> The goal is to relieve interpersonal conflicts within the entire family environment as a way of supporting

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<sup>124</sup>Gardner, 57-8.

<sup>125</sup>Tessman, 529.

<sup>126</sup>Tessman, 527.

<sup>127</sup>Gardner, 51.

<sup>128</sup>Stuart L. Kaplan, "Structural Family Therapy for Children of Divorce: Case Reports," Family Process 16 (Mar. 1977): 75.

the child.<sup>129</sup>

Salvador Minuchin writes that difficulties in divorcing families occur because some family members are unable to give up their commitments to the patterns of relationships which existed in the pre-divorce family.<sup>130</sup> He believes that therapy with divorcing families should focus not on individuals, but on the entire family.<sup>131</sup> The goal is to create new patterns of interaction in the post-divorce family which are acceptable and supportive of all the members in the family.<sup>132</sup> Instead of facilitating catharsis and the exploration of children's conflicted emotions, as does the intrapsychic approach, Minuchin attempts to facilitate a smooth transition in family organization and relationships from the pre-divorce family to the divorced family, thus easing the stress of divorce.<sup>133</sup>

Also in a family therapy mode, Marla Isaacs writes that the process of adjustment to divorce "gets stuck" when family members cannot make the transition to the new divorced family.<sup>134</sup> Difficulties in divorced families arise when family members attempt to develop post-divorce patterns of interaction which are similar to those of the pre-divorce

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<sup>129</sup>Kaplan, 83.

<sup>130</sup>Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy, 100.

<sup>131</sup>Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope, 48.

<sup>132</sup>Minuchin, Families and Family Therapy, 100.

<sup>133</sup>Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope, 46.

<sup>134</sup>Marla B. Isaacs, "Treatment for Families of Divorce: A Systems Model of Prevention," Children of Separation and Divorce: Management and Treatment, eds. Irving R. Stuart and Lawrence Edwin Abt (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981), 259.

family. She terms these efforts to maintain the pre-divorce family patterns, the "strategies" of various family members.<sup>135</sup> The therapist's goal with divorcing families is to discover and counter strategies to maintain the old family by offering instead new, satisfying relational patterns.<sup>136</sup>

#### Parents as the Focus of Therapy

Regardless of philosophical orientation, the literature emphasizes interventions with parents as a means of supporting children. Wallerstein and Kelly found a direct relationship in divorced families between diminished parenting effectiveness and depression in children. They believe that any care for divorcing families should include efforts to support parents in their care for children.<sup>137</sup> Messinger and Walker develop a therapeutic approach aimed at facilitating effective and satisfying involvement by both parents in the lives of their children at each stage of the divorce process.<sup>138</sup> Minuchin believes that counseling for divorced families should be aimed at helping parents accept new family configurations while continuing to accept their role in parenting their children.<sup>139</sup>

#### Counseling Groups

Yet another group of literature describes school-based counseling groups for children of divorce. This literature appears particularly

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<sup>135</sup>Isaacs, 243.

<sup>136</sup>Isaacs, 243.

<sup>137</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 309-10.

<sup>138</sup>Messinger and Walker, 434.

<sup>139</sup>Minuchin, Family Kaleidoscope, 48.

fruitful for a discussion of support by the church as much of the material is transferable from the school to the church. Kalter and others note that counseling groups specifically for children of divorce are a relatively new phenomenon.<sup>140</sup> Mary Sonnenshein-Schneider and Kay Baird believe that the general efficacy of counseling groups for all populations of children indicates a high probability that they may have great potential as a counseling setting for children of divorce.<sup>141</sup> Janice Hammond reports that children of divorce express a specific desire to talk with other children of divorce and have friendships with them as part of their support network.<sup>142</sup> JoAnne Pedro-Carroll and Emory Cowen also report positive responses among children of divorce to participation in counseling groups with other children of divorce.<sup>143</sup>

Kalter and others write that the school is an especially advantageous setting for counseling groups with children of divorce. Schools are natural environments for contact with children, peer group relationships already exist in schools, and discussions of divorce in such a place as the familiar school setting helps children understand that divorce is part of normal life experience.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 613.

<sup>141</sup>Mary Sonnenshein-Schneider and Kay L. Baird, "Group Counseling Children of Divorce in the Elementary Schools: Understanding Process and Technique," Personnel and Guidance Journal 59 (Oct. 1980): 88.

<sup>142</sup>Janice M. Hammond, "Loss of the Family Unit: Counseling Groups to Help Kids," Personnel and Guidance Journal 59 (Feb. 1981): 393.

<sup>143</sup>JoAnne L. Pedro-Carroll and Emory L. Cowen, "The Children of Divorce Intervention Program: An Investigation of the Efficacy of a School-Based Prevention Program," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 53 (1985): 609.

<sup>144</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 614.

Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird also point out that much of a child's development occurs through peer group encounters, often in the school. They believe school-based counseling groups for children of divorce can be especially helpful to restore the developmental process that is often interrupted by divorce.<sup>145</sup> Hammond outlines two values of school-based groups: (1) the formation of supportive peer relationships which continue outside formal group meetings, and (2) the natural values clarification processes which take place in schools--in formal classroom settings and informal social interactions. Discussions of divorce in the school, a familiar setting, help children of divorce clarify their own values and confusions about divorce and marriage.<sup>146</sup>

The goals of groups for children of divorce are centered emotional catharsis and problem solving. Kalter lists group goals as helping the child understand that divorce is a normal part of life; providing the child with clarification about the divorce process; developing a safe environment for emotional expressions; learning problem solving skills; and education of parents about children's divorce-related experiences.<sup>147</sup> Pedro-Carroll and Cowen believe that groups should facilitate emotional expressions, but more importantly, should focus on the development of problem solving skills in children to more adequately deal with the various divorce-related problems that regularly confront them. Problem solving skills include assertiveness training, anger control, conflict resolution methods, and increased

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<sup>145</sup>Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird, 88.

<sup>146</sup>Hammond, 392-93.

<sup>147</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 614.

communication skills.<sup>148</sup> Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird focus the purpose of their groups around a supportive, shared empathy which develops among the members of the group.<sup>149</sup> Hammond lists the goals of her groups as clarification of feelings about divorce, learning that many children of divorce have similar feelings, development of communication and coping skills, and exploration of children's feelings and attitudes about their own future romantic relationships and marriages.<sup>150</sup>

Divorce group methods include a wide variety of techniques, many of which are traditional to psychotherapy with children. Kalter and others use story telling, role playing, skits, story writing, and group discussions of common divorce-related experiences and emotions.<sup>151</sup> Hammond describes the use of art work, sentence completion activities, movies and assertiveness training.<sup>152</sup> Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird use many of these same techniques in addition to the use of puppets, role rehearsals (role playing of potential conflict situations), and "brainstorming," a technique that involves gathering a wide variety of possible problem solving suggestions to a problem encountered by a member of the group--with no censuring of any child's suggestions.<sup>153</sup>

In summary, the literature on therapy with children of divorce

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<sup>148</sup>Pedro-Carroll and Cowen, 605.

<sup>149</sup>Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird, 88.

<sup>150</sup>Hammond, 393.

<sup>151</sup>Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz, 615-16.

<sup>152</sup>Hammond, 393-94.

<sup>153</sup>Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird, 90.



indicates that interventions with children of divorce are effective and desired by children. Support for children of divorce needs to be based on models of immediate crisis intervention and long-range caregiving at a variety of developmental points in the child's life. Such support will help the child move through various stages of acceptance of the divorce and post-divorce family. The literature suggests that support for children may be focused on both a cathartic expression of the child's divorce-related emotions and problem solving skills for dealing with the post-divorce social network. One key goal of intervention with children is to support continued effective parenting and nurture of the child. Another important goal is the reduction of conflict between child and parents and between the ex-spouses. Counseling groups for children of divorce appear to be especially useful. Some literature suggests that the school is an advantageous location for groups--contact with children of divorce can easily be made, peer group relationships are well established, adult role models are available, the school can have contact with both child and parent, and dealing with divorce in such a familiar setting helps the child realize that divorce is a normal part of life.

Many of these therapeutic guidelines would apply to an intervention by the church. A local church congregation potentially has contact with the child over time, perhaps for many years prior to the divorce, during the immediate crisis of divorce, and in the years following divorce. In addition, the church may have contact with both husband and wife as well as children to fulfill a mediating role in their changing relationships and circumstances. The church may also have contact with

the extended family network and may be able facilitate caregiving to children by the extended family. In fact, members of the extended family may be in the congregation.

The material on groups in the school for children of divorce is especially helpful to guide an intervention by the church. The local congregation is also a natural setting for many children, peer groups are established in the church as well as at the school, adult role models are also available and the church may also be able to help the child realize that divorce is a normal part of living. This is especially true since the church is oftentimes a place of values clarification.

At this point the answers to some of the underlying questions of the chapter are becoming more clear. The research literature seems to support the conclusion that divorce has a significant, life-changing impact on children. Social supports for children, including therapeutic interventions for some children, appear to be appropriate and useful. And, some literature indirectly supports the conclusion that the church, which has some of the same natural advantages as the school, would appear to be an appropriate source of support for children. Involvement by the church would appear to be supported more by the social theories of divorce which emphasizes the role of the social network of the child rather than the intrapsychic processes. However, the question remains to be answered, does any literature from sources inside the church confirm a supportive involvement with children of divorce? Are the conclusions reached thus far supported when sources from inside the church are reviewed?

### Children of Divorce and the Church

As has been mentioned, only a small amount of literature on children of divorce was found from sources within the church. While a larger body of literature was found which does examine the relationship between the church and divorced adults, little mention is made of children.

As an example of the literature discussing divorced adults, Robert Coates describes the need for a theology of divorce which emphasizes God's unconditional love for all persons, regardless of marital status, with a view of the church as a community of grace and forgiveness for the divorced.<sup>154</sup> Coates mentions three tasks of pastoral care for divorcing persons--preaching, divorce mediation, and referrals. Preaching should be aimed both at educating the congregation about the situation of divorced persons and offering the supportive services of the pastor to those who are divorced.<sup>155</sup> Mediation is aimed at helping divorcing couples resolve conflicts, express grief and reach responsible decisions about post-divorce family life, including child custody agreements.<sup>156</sup> The pastor can also work to develop a support network within the congregation to support those who divorce.<sup>157</sup> Finally, the pastor can refer divorcing persons to other helping professionals in the community for legal help or psychological counseling, both of which

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<sup>154</sup>Robert B. Coates, "Ministry of Mediation: The Divorce Settlement," Journal of Pastoral Care 37 (1983): 266-67.

<sup>155</sup>Coates, 271-72.

<sup>156</sup>Coates, 272.

<sup>157</sup>Coates, 272-73.

are out of the scope of the pastor's abilities and training.<sup>158</sup> Coates believes that through the church, the divorcing process will be enveloped in a mood of reconciliation and mediation, not adversity.<sup>159</sup>

Another useful example of the literature dealing with the church and divorce, though not with children of divorce, is that of Ardean Goertzen, who developed a "divorce ritual" for use within Mennonite congregations.<sup>160</sup> Goertzen developed a divorce ceremony, intended to be similar to the wedding ceremony, held within the church, which offers the church's "blessing" in the passage from one stage of life to another.<sup>161</sup> Such a ceremony, involving the participation of all the members of the congregation, creates an atmosphere in which divorce is acknowledged and accepted by the congregation, allowing the divorcing couple to remain active in the life of the congregation.<sup>162</sup> In this way the church can be a greater source of support to the divorcing persons.

Yet another article discusses divorce as an event of spiritual growth. Jean Blomquist uses a case study method to develop the view that divorce actually causes divorcing persons to grow spiritually as they seek God's support and intervention to deal with the emotional

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<sup>158</sup>Coates, 273.

<sup>159</sup>Coates, 273.

<sup>160</sup>Ardean L. Goertzen, "Falling Rings: Group and Ritual Process in a Divorce," Journal of Religion and Health 26 (1987): 219.

<sup>161</sup>Goertzen, 235.

<sup>162</sup>Goertzen, 224-30.

trauma of divorce.<sup>163</sup> The usefulness of this article appears to be in its emphasis on the ongoing spiritual needs of divorcing adults. In fact, it suggests the possibility that the period following divorce is a time of heightened spiritual interest, activity, and need.

Another group of literature, perhaps the largest amount of literature on divorce and the church, is exemplified by Roger Crook.<sup>164</sup> This work is a general discussion of many facets of the psychological, social and economic effects of divorce, written to the Christian person, with only minimal attention given to any spiritual dimensions of divorce. One chapter is devoted to children's reactions to divorce, giving the parent guidance in how to care for their children's psychological and emotional reactions. However, no mention is made of the child's spiritual life and nothing is written about the relationship between the church and the child.<sup>165</sup>

A small amount of literature was found which calls for care and support for children of divorce. William Arnold has written a book specifically for teenagers and young adults in the church. He discusses the divorce experience, with a considerable focus on the relationship between the church and the young person.<sup>166</sup> Arnold describes the church as a place where young people can both find

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<sup>163</sup>Jean M. Blomquist, "The Effect of the Divorce Experience on Spiritual Growth," Pastoral Psychology 34 (Winter 1985): 91.

<sup>164</sup>Roger H. Crook, An Open Book to the Christian Divorcee (Nashville: Broadman, 1974).

<sup>165</sup>Crook, 93-113.

<sup>166</sup>William V. Arnold, When Your Parents Divorce (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 45-50.

support to help adjust to divorce and can "escape" from the pressures of life in a divorced family by participating in the activities and friendships of the congregation.<sup>167</sup> Arnold encourages his readers to seek out their pastor for discussions about divorce. If their pastor is unapproachable or unhelpful, Arnold encourages them to go to another congregation where they might find a more supportive pastor.<sup>168</sup> In the same vein, Arnold acknowledges that some churches are unaccepting of divorced families, but he cites examples of other churches where divorced persons are more than welcome. He notes that some churches hold groups especially for children of divorce, and encourages his readers to seek out these churches.<sup>169</sup> Arnold's book may be one of the more helpful resources found from within the church for children of divorce.

Finally, in a more practical discussion of the role of the church in the lives of children of divorce, Christopher Camplair and others study the role of the clergyperson in child custody decisions. They found that many divorcing adults find the clergy to be helpful in this area. Camplair and others discovered that seventeen percent of the persons in their study relied on a clergyperson to help them make child custody decisions.<sup>170</sup> Clergypersons were one of the more emotionally helpful persons in custody decisions, when compared to all other helping

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<sup>167</sup>Arnold, 48.

<sup>168</sup>Arnold, 49.

<sup>169</sup>Arnold, 45.

<sup>170</sup>Christopher W. Camplair, Arnold L. Stolberg, and Everett L. Worthington, "Influencers in Child Custody Decisions," Journal of Pastoral Care 41 (1987): 263-64.

professionals.<sup>171</sup> Clergy were also among the most helpful in providing child custody information.<sup>172</sup> However, clergy were also found to function predominately by forming alliances with individuals who sought their counsel. Because of this tendency to build coalitions, the clergy were among the least helpful in facilitating negotiations on child custody between divorcing spouses; clergy were too often allied with one spouse against the other, often against the spouse who had "left" their church.<sup>173</sup>

This literature clearly supports the general thrust of this chapter that the church can be a valuable source of support for children of divorce. Interestingly, Wayne Oates writes that the church is one place where children of divorce who do continue to attend a church may find increased support, in greater amounts than is given to children generally.<sup>174</sup> Oates encourages parents to help their children establish personal relationships with ministers or other church leaders, to find support in their adjustment to divorce.<sup>175</sup>

### Conclusion

The concern of this chapter has been to describe the nature of children's divorce experience and develop an understanding of the need for social supports. Divorce is seen as a difficult event, with a

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<sup>171</sup>Camplair, Stolberg, and Worthington, 265.

<sup>172</sup>Camplair, Stolberg, and Worthington, 265.

<sup>173</sup>Camplair, Stolberg, and Worthington, 265.

<sup>174</sup>Wayne E. Oates, "A Minister's Views on Children of Divorce," Explaining Divorce to Children, ed. Earl A. Grollman (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 160.

<sup>175</sup>Oates, 161.

more focused crisis in the period immediately following parental separation and a longer-term adjustment to post-divorce family organization. Divorce appears to effect children because it creates psychological, social and economic disruptions in the child's familiar living and relational patterns. Social supports appear to be useful to children of divorce in helping to minimize the disorganizing effects of divorce. An institution such as the church may be helpful to children. The church may be a source of stability in the child's life as the child may have a relationship with a church community that predates the divorce and continues throughout the child's post divorce adjustments. Within the church there are a number of resources which may be helpful for the child. Not only can the pastor and professional staff of the church be helpful, but the informal interpersonal network may provide significant support. The aid of the church may come in such forms as pastoral counseling and mediation, divorce recovery groups, or referrals to helping persons in the community. In addition, the support of the church may come as a result of the church's normal activities which provide the child an escape from divorce-related feelings and events. Finally, the friendships and informal relationships of the church may be valuable in helping the child ease the tensions and stress of the divorce.

However, many of these conclusions are based on information from a wide variety of sources, many of which are not at all related to the church. A useful step is to discuss one specific denomination as a social support for children of divorce. As the study group of this thesis is the Church of the Brethren, it is necessary to explore



Brethren sources which describe and undergird a definition of this particular church as a support for children of divorce.

## CHAPTER 3

The Church of the Brethren as a Social Support  
for Children of Divorce

The task of individual church members is to surround the divorcing persons with love and concern. Divorce as a tragedy is not to be judged, but is to be seen with sorrow and compassion. It is hurtful to take sides. Our best efforts are to be concentrated in helping those who are suffering through divorce to find forgiveness and healing.'

This chapter will focus on one denomination, the Church of the Brethren, as a social support for children of divorce. The quote above is taken from an official position paper of the Church of the Brethren on marriage and divorce and expresses a clear desire by the Brethren to be accepting and caring of divorcing persons. This chapter will propose that the theology of community found in the Church of the Brethren provides a valuable foundation for a definition of the Brethren as a support to children of divorce.

To this end, several foundational questions will be explored in the chapter: How do the Brethren define themselves? Would the Brethren see themselves as a support for children of divorce? What do they believe about divorce? What do they believe about children in their midst? And, how would they support children of divorce? This chapter will answer these questions by reviewing three groups of material: Brethren literature discussing the theology of the church as a faith

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<sup>1</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce: A Biblical Guide to Caring and Healing in the Family of Faith (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1977), 10.

community; Brethren statements on marriage and divorce; and, a review of Brethren positions on the role of children in the community and ministries with children.

### The Church as Community

A belief in the gathered church, or the church as community, has been an essential element of Church of the Brethren theology and polity since the inception of the church. Donald Durnbaugh notes that when the early Brethren formed themselves into a "brotherhood," or community, they did so intentionally, believing that in community they were most accurately imitating the New Testament church.<sup>2</sup> As shall be seen, Brethren believe they join into community as a response to God. God's voice is heard through the life and prayerful deliberations of the community. In life together God's love is expressed. And, each member of the community is called to actively minister to others in the faith community and in the world.

### The Free Church Tradition

Church of the Brethren scholars uniformly place the historical roots of the Brethren within the European "Free Church" movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Durnbaugh, among others, terms this tradition the "Radical Reformation."<sup>3</sup> Of central concern to the Free Church movement was the nature of the church. Franklin Littell describes the view of church history in the Free Church as

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<sup>2</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Early History," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. Donald F. Durnbaugh (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1971), 11.

<sup>3</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Membership in the Body of Christ as Interpreted by the Radical Reformation," Brethren Life and Thought, 9 (Autum 1964): 50.

"primitivist," with the New Testament church as normative.<sup>4</sup> The Radical Reformers desired to "restore" the church to the ideal of the original, New Testament church.<sup>5</sup> Durnbaugh lists the central themes of the Free Church tradition as: a freely gathered group of believers; personal discipleship; primitive Christianity as a norm for life; the church congregation as a fellowship of saints who strive for purity; a theology of an active Holy Spirit working in the church; a discarding of sacraments in favor of "ordinances"; and a non-hierarchical view of ministry.<sup>6</sup>

Within the Free Church tradition the early Brethren were influenced by both Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. The central concept of Anabaptism was discipleship--obedience to the commands of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Anabaptism emphasized voluntary church membership through adult baptism, the separation of church and state, the church as community, ethics of love and nonresistance, and the restoration of primitive Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Pietism, on the other hand, emphasized the internal, personal leading of the Holy Spirit and committed personal devotionalism.<sup>9</sup> Pietism was

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<sup>4</sup>Franklin H. Littell, "The Historical Free Church Defined," Brethren Life and Thought, 9 (Autumn 1964): 85-9.

<sup>5</sup>Durnbaugh, "Membership in the Body of Christ," 59.

<sup>6</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, "The Church in Its Historical Expression," Brethren Life and Thought, 6 (Summer 1961): 36.

<sup>7</sup>Dale W. Brown, "Membership in the Body of Christ as Interpreted by the Heritage of the Brethren," Brethren Life and Thought, 9 (Autumn 1964): 64.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Allen C. Deeter, "Membership in the Body of Christ as Interpreted by Classical Pietism," Brethren Life and Thought, 9 (Autumn 1964): 30.

mystical and subjective, giving objective forms of belief and practice a secondary position.<sup>10</sup>

For Anabaptists the church was a gathered body of obedient and disciplined believers, set apart from the world in an attempt to remain true to God's rule.<sup>11</sup> The church was the "true congregation of Christ" as it existed in the world.<sup>12</sup> Membership in the community entailed a deep and sincere love of neighbor--in the church and the world.<sup>13</sup>

While the Anabaptists stressed a "visible" church, the Pietists stressed an "invisible" church.<sup>14</sup> For Pietists the church was a community of believers who were gathered to encourage and support the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals and in the world.<sup>15</sup> The church was a disciplined community of love, as Christ intended, whose purpose was to undergird the inner faith journey of true believers.<sup>16</sup> Mow describes the Pietist view of the church as "devotional gatherings of the regenerated," with only a secondary purpose of sharing fellowship.<sup>17</sup>

The early Brethren embraced both a sense of discipleship and

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<sup>10</sup>Durnbaugh, "Early History," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 10. See also, Deeter, 36.

<sup>11</sup>Durnbaugh, "Membership in the Body of Christ," 57.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 58-9.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>15</sup>Deeter, 36-7.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Mow, "Community Among the Brethren," Brethren Life and Thought 1 (Autumn 1955): 66.

discipline from Anabaptism and Pietist valuing of the inner word and direction of the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> As the Brethren formed into faith communities they were aware that in that act they were deviating from the more individualistic Pietist leanings which had been most influential on them to that point. A primary reason for the formation of community was to imitate the practice of baptism, as Jesus had been baptized in the New Testament.<sup>19</sup> Durnbaugh writes,

The best way to understand the early Brethren is to see them as a Radical Pietist group which appropriated an Anabaptist view of the church. They stressed a gathered church of believers, the discipline of church members, a nonresistant approach to the state, and a theology of obedience.<sup>20</sup>

To emphasize the nature of the church as a gathered community of believers, Alexander Mack, perhaps the most influential early Brethren leader, preferred to use the German term Gemeinde, when writing about the church, instead of the more common term Kirche.<sup>21</sup> The literal translation of Gemeinde is "community." Interestingly, Gemeinde might also be translated as "commune."<sup>22</sup> The term Kirche, which Mack preferred to not use, is translated more directly as church. Kirche might also be translated as "chapel" or "church service" (the worship

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<sup>18</sup>Dale W. Brown, "The Church and the Church of the Brethren," Brethren Life and Thought 6 (Summer 1961): 19.

<sup>19</sup>Durnbaugh, "Early History," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 11.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Floyd E. Mallott, Studies in Brethren History (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 164.

<sup>22</sup>"Gemeinde," Cassell's German Dictionary (New York: Macmillan, 1978).

service).<sup>23</sup> Floyd Mallott remarks that in using the term Gemeinde, Mack was placing the emphasis "upon fellowship, the family of faith, upon the observance of brotherhood."<sup>24</sup>

The feeling of fellowship and unity which the early Brethren felt for one another was termed the Gemeinschaft.<sup>25</sup> This German word might be translated as "mutual interest" or "partnership."<sup>26</sup> Vernard Eller writes that while there is no exact English equivalent for Gemeinschaft, it might be understood to mean, "the intimate sense of union that comes as a group shares some deep commitment in common."<sup>27</sup> The feeling of Gemeinschaft, or loyalty to one another, is felt at the "deepest" levels.<sup>28</sup> The Gemeinschaft, or feeling of unity created by common commitment to Christ, creates the Gemeinde, the church, and takes precedence over doctrine and sacraments as the unifying element of community.<sup>29</sup>

In summary the Brethren are historically a sectarian group who were "set apart" from the world and were bound together into community by their common faith and their common desire to live in faithful responsiveness to God. Intentional participation in the community was

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<sup>23</sup>"Kirche," Cassell's German Dictionary.

<sup>24</sup>Mallott, 164.

<sup>25</sup>Vernard Eller, "Beliefs," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 43.

<sup>26</sup>"Gemeinschaft," Cassell's German Dictionary.

<sup>27</sup>Eller, "Beliefs," 43.

<sup>28</sup>Vernard Eller, Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 337.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

central to faithfulness. The community was both a source of support and discipline in each member's faith journey.

The historical traditions of the Brethren indicate a central role for the faith community in the life of each member. The individual and community were intertwined in living and responding to God. Further review of the elements of the theology of community confirm this view and indicate that the community is an actively caring community.

### Theological Elements of Community

God's activity and community. Joseph Mow calls the inseparable relationship of God's love for humankind and the love of persons for one another, the "doctrinal basis for Brethren community."<sup>30</sup> God's love creates in the believer the desire to love others and be in fellowship with them. Relationships in the community are the means by which God's love and forgiving grace become a reality in the world.<sup>31</sup> The love which persons express for one another in the faith community is the earthly expression of God's love.

The Christological community. The model of Jesus is the basis for life in community and is the basis of the Brethren tradition of caring activity. The Brethren can accurately be called a Christological community. Donald Miller, in reference to 1 Corinthians 12, describes the Brethren as the "fellowship of those who are in Christ."<sup>32</sup> Warren Groff calls the Brethren the "community of the Spirit of Christ, of

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<sup>30</sup>Mow, 70.

<sup>31</sup>Dale W. Brown, "Liturgy," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 56.

<sup>32</sup>Donald E. Miller, "Guiding the Group Life of the church," Brethren Life and Thought 2 (Autumn 1957): 22.



those who 'bear witness' to Christ and are 'fellow heirs' with Christ."<sup>32</sup> The Christological center of the community is the foundation for ministry. As Brethren enter into community with Christ through baptism, they enter into his ministry and take on his sacrificial caring for others.<sup>34</sup>

Community and the Holy Spirit. Brethren have emphasized Christ's living reality through a belief in a continued presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the community.<sup>35</sup> The modern-day community, the "Koinonia," is created and guided by the living Spirit of Christ, not by the activity of humans.<sup>36</sup> Michal Novak notes that in the Free Church tradition, the authority of the community comes not from human intuition or strength, but from the belief that the Holy Spirit is leading the community.<sup>37</sup>

The New Testament community. For Brethren the New Testament is the central record of the life and activity of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> Eller emphasizes that for Brethren an essential task of the community is to maintain faithfulness to the New Testament in a manner which allows the

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<sup>32</sup>Warren F. Groff, "The Church: Its Nature and Function," Brethren Life and Thought 6 (Summer 1961): 15.

<sup>34</sup>Warren F. Groff, "Brethren Identity and the Unity of the Church," Brethren Life and Thought 20 (Autumn 1975): 199.

<sup>35</sup>Groff, "The Church," 11.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>37</sup>Michal Novak, "The Free Churches and the Roman Church," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 2 (Fall 1965): 441.

<sup>38</sup>Eller, "Beliefs," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 42.

scriptures to "live" and have influence in the lives of the believers.<sup>39</sup> The Holy Spirit leads the community to fresh understandings of the scriptures and God's will. Eller calls this the "communal action of the Spirit."<sup>40</sup> The scriptures are not a static legal document, rather they speak for a living God. The living God speaks through the testing of discussion and shared interpretation of the Biblical account in the gathering of believers.<sup>41</sup>

The eschatological community. As Brethren join together for mutual edification and encouragement there is a consciousness of being on a faith journey together. Eller describes the Brethren as a "caravan" of travelers, "banded together...in seeking a common destination."<sup>42</sup> The goal which the Brethren seek is faithfulness to God and to the mind of Christ. The eschatological feeling of the community is not of a final goal to be attained, but rather of an ongoing ideal of true faithfulness.<sup>43</sup> Dale Stoffer describes Brethren eschatology as "realized eschatology."<sup>44</sup> While Brethren eschatological writings have historically centered on a premillennial view of Christ's return, or an imminent return, the community has had the flavor of a realized or actualized eschatology. That is, Christ is present and alive in their

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Dale R. Stoffer, "Beliefs," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1986), 51.

life together--in their ability to realize grace, forgiveness and transformation in themselves and among one another.<sup>45</sup>

The community as sacrament. As mentioned, for Brethren, participation in the interpersonal relationships of the community is one of the means by which God's healing grace is conveyed. Likewise, participation in the ceremonial practices of the faith, the rites and ordinances, is one form of interpersonal interaction. Groff writes that a classic definition of sacrament is "any person or activity instituted by Christ to serve as a 'means of grace.'"<sup>46</sup> He goes on to add that Brethren believe the community is a "sacrament" because God's grace is conveyed to persons through the reconciling love they share with one another.<sup>47</sup> Mow notes that while Brethren are a non-sacramental group, the rites and ordinances which are practiced--adult baptism, love feast, anointing, and laying on of hands--create an adhesiveness and social unity in the community.<sup>48</sup>

Priesthood of all believers. Throughout the history of the Free Church there has been a belief that every member of the community has a responsibility for ministry. Littell points out that this emphasis does not deny the role of the clergy, but rather it elevates the role of the laity and involves all persons in the ministry of the church.<sup>49</sup> Once again the model of Jesus is central. As the Brethren imitate Jesus,

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>46</sup>Groff, "Brethren Identity and Unity," 200.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Mow, 72.

<sup>49</sup>Littell, 87.

are baptized as Jesus was and enter into the community, they take on the loving, saving work of Jesus.<sup>50</sup> Each member of the community is a "priest" for others, that is, deeply concerned about the spiritual and personal welfare of every other person.<sup>51</sup> In practice, the Brethren have a long history of "Free Ministry," in which ministers are simply members of the community, equal in power and authority to all others. Some community members are "set apart" or ordained into the office of "minister," to perform tasks on behalf of the community--preaching, weddings, funerals, etc.<sup>52</sup> When the one who has been set apart leaves the "office" of ministry, their ordination ends.<sup>53</sup>

The peacemaking community. Caring for those in need has been a hallmark of Brethren activity throughout the history of the church.<sup>54</sup> Soon after their arrival in the United States, the earliest Brethren, themselves primarily German immigrants, began efforts in Philadelphia to minister to other poverty stricken German immigrants. Early in their history the Brethren founded a home for the aged, developed missionary work based on service as a form of evangelism, and opposed the slave system they found in America.<sup>55</sup> Loren Bowman writes that the Brethren

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<sup>50</sup>Brown, "Liturgy," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 56.

<sup>51</sup>Stoffer, "Beliefs," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 53.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Church of the Brethren General Board, Ministry Manual: Polity, Procedures, Guidelines (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1978), 3.

<sup>54</sup>Eller, "Beliefs," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 47.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

goal has been to continue the "work of Christ" to persons in need as a way of living the "Christlike life."<sup>56</sup> This ideal has developed into what is perhaps the central point of Brethren identity, the pacifist thrust and reconciling activity. Dale Brown calls this the most significant contribution the Brethren have made to all of Christendom.<sup>57</sup>

#### The Community as Common Identity, Discipline, and Mission

For the purposes of this discussion, this author would divide the Brethren theology of community into three major elements: the common identity, the common discipline, and the common mission. Each element is useful to understand how the Brethren would support children of divorce.

The common identity. For Brethren, community is an identity-giving process. Miller uses sociological theory to describe the church as an important "primary group" for Brethren. The primary group is that group in which one's "basic social drives...find expression."<sup>58</sup> Eller points out that the Gemeinschaft, the bond of love, is often experienced as a "family feeling" in all areas of community life.<sup>59</sup> When the Brethren gather they feel they are joining together into a family. Importantly, the community is inclusive of all persons.<sup>60</sup> Officially, the Brethren have an open membership. They welcome into membership

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<sup>56</sup>S. Loren Bowman, "Polity," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 80.

<sup>57</sup>Brown, "Membership in the Body of Christ," 67.

<sup>58</sup>Miller, 26.

<sup>59</sup>Eller, "Beliefs," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 44.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 45.

persons from diverse faith group backgrounds which use varying forms of baptism and communion.<sup>41</sup>

One important facet of Brethren identity is the feeling in each person and each generation that they belong to a common history and tradition. Groff writes that Brethren believe the community is "preexistent" to their individual belonging. The community is not created by the joining of the persons in each age, rather each generation of persons joins into a community which is ongoing and each generation integrates the historic community into their common identity.<sup>42</sup> Eugene Roop believes that a key element of Brethren identity is their feeling of being a "homogeneous" group with a common "Torah," a common story.<sup>43</sup> Part of that "common story" is a belief that the Brethren are called to be "agents of God's blessing to all the world."<sup>44</sup>

The common discipline. For Brethren, community is a moral process. Stoffer calls the Brethren a "Hermeneutical" community.<sup>45</sup> That is, Brethren believe that through their prayer and study together, God's truth is discerned and in discernment there is direction.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Brown, "Liturgy," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 56.

<sup>42</sup>Groff, "Brethren Identity and Unity," 207.

<sup>43</sup>Eugene F. Roop, "Torah and the Brethren," Brethren Life and Thought 25 (Spring 1980): 34.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Stoffer, "Beliefs," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 52.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

Mow, in similar fashion, writes that for Brethren, community is a moral category, not just a "sociological phenomenon."<sup>67</sup> Mow points out that for Brethren the moral process is not limited to discerning and knowing the truth, but also includes the willingness to allow the moral discernment to shape every aspect of life. All life is to be based on such moral categories as honesty, fairness, and simplicity.<sup>68</sup> The Brethren have historically held one another accountable for lifestyle and decision making.<sup>69</sup> The Brethren have a sense of joining together to counsel and guide one another in responding faithfully to God's leadings in all things.<sup>70</sup> Groff notes that the mood of this moral process is neither arbitrary or authoritative, rather it is one of mutual respect and caring--the Brethren are mutual authorities in discipleship.<sup>71</sup>

The common mission. For Brethren, community is a care-giving process. Joseph Mason writes that the Brethren are more interested in "being" the church than in defining the church.<sup>72</sup> He writes, "the issue for Brethren has been, what is the church's mission? What must the church do?"<sup>73</sup> The process of uniting into community (the common

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<sup>67</sup>Mow, 69.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Groff, "Brethren Identity and Unity," 200.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Joseph M. Mason, "A Brethren View of the Church," Brethren Life and Thought 24 (Spring 1979): 90.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 94.

identity) and making life decisions (the moral process) is done always with a focus on extending God's love to others. Perhaps the essential category for understanding Brethren community is to understand that it is a caring community. Eller describes this as, "the heart of Brethrenism ... what the faith is all about."<sup>74</sup> The Brethren can accurately be described as a community of persons who desire to respond to God's call in every life event by extending God's love to all persons in need. Stoffer calls the Brethren a "mutual aid society," to describe their historic willingness to come to one another's aid in times of need, to meet both spiritual and physical needs. Self-insurance programs and barn-raising were the more historic expression of their caregiving, with peacemaking programs and retirement facilities being more modern examples.<sup>75</sup> Importantly, as Merle Crouse and Karen Carter write, the extension of God's love has been done throughout the history of the church in concrete acts of care and support for a wide variety of persons, in a wide variety of places, with a wide variety of needs, not simply to Brethren persons alone.<sup>76</sup>

### Summary

With these elements of the Brethren theology of community in mind, some of the initial questions of the chapter will be stated once again: How do the Brethren define themselves? Does the theology of community

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<sup>74</sup>Eller, "Beliefs," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 46.

<sup>75</sup>Stoffer, "Beliefs," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 54.

<sup>76</sup>B. Merle Crouse and Karen Spohr Carter, "Mission," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 135.



suggest that the Brethren would see themselves as a social support to children of divorce? And, how would the Brethren support children of divorce?

The Free Church tradition would suggest that from their inception there has been a strong group identity and cohesiveness among the Brethren. The Brethren formed themselves into a community for the purposes of support, edification and discipline in living faithfully and responsively to God. The Brethren are in community because they feel God has called them together. All of this would suggest a high level of awareness and intentionality about their affiliation with one another and their involvement in one another's lives.

The community is a loving and forgiving community. God's love for persons finds concrete expression in the love of the community. The sacrificial model of Jesus is imitated and the biblical account is taken as normative for life. The community has authority for Brethren because the Holy Spirit leads the community. Life in the community is similar to a common journey, with a common goal of ongoing faithfulness. The community celebrates established rites and ordinances to symbolize God's activity in the common life and to foster cohesiveness among the believers. As the model of Jesus demonstrates, entry into the community through baptism means taking on an active and giving ministry of love and caring for all persons in need. Ministry is the responsibility of each believer and is aimed at reconciling, peacemaking, and mutual aid--in the community and worldwide.

The Brethren would certainly appear to be a community of persons who would care for children of divorce in their midst. In fact, this

author would suggest that the Brethren provide a unique model of support for children of divorce--caregiving through life together in the community. As noted, the Brethren are an inclusive community of persons who desire to respond to God's leading in all events. As shall be cited, that has included a desire to be caring to divorced persons.

This author has highlighted three elements of the theology of community: a common identity, a common discipline, and a common mission. The Brethren are affiliated with like-minded believers, to advise and support one another in life's journey, and to come to the aid of one another, and the aid of all persons, in times of brokenness and distress.

These three elements of community appear to suggest specific ways in which caregiving by the community would be extended to children of divorce. Through the common identity of community the Brethren would attempt to affiliate with children of divorce and include them in the healing love of the relationships in the community. Through the common discipline of community the Brethren would search with those who are divorced to seek ways to faithfully respond to God in the events of the entire divorce process, keeping foremost as a goal the ideals of peacemaking and reconciliation of all brokenness. Through the common mission of the community the Brethren would seek to offer concrete supports and ministries to children of divorce. Importantly, these would be ministries offered by each member of the community.

On a practical level, these three elements of community give direction to the empirical research of this thesis. Quite briefly, the survey of children objectively measures the relationship between

children of divorce and a local Brethren congregation in each of these areas. That is, the common identity is measured by children's indication of their inclusion in the activities and relationships of the congregation. The common discipline is measured by the child's indication of the importance of the church to his or her daily living. The common mission is measured by the presence of specific ministry activities for divorcing families in the congregation.

However, before proceeding to the survey, several important background questions remain to be answered. Most significantly, do these conclusions reached through a review of the Brethren theology of community seem to agree with what the Brethren actually say about divorce? Does a theology of caregiving through life in the community agree with the history of Brethren beliefs about divorce and actions toward divorcing persons? To answer these questions the next segment of this chapter will review the history of Brethren statements and responses to divorce and divorced persons.

#### The Brethren and Divorce

In recent years two helpful reviews of the history and development of Church of the Brethren positions on marriage and divorce have been written. Roop, in a discussion of church discipline, explored historical Brethren responses to instances of divorce and remarriage.<sup>77</sup> Carter, building on Roop's work, studied recent experiences of divorced clergypersons in the Church of the Brethren.<sup>78</sup> As both works are

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<sup>77</sup>Roop, "Brethren and Church Discipline (I)," 92; "Brethren and Church Discipline (II)," 168.

<sup>78</sup>Carter.

thorough in outlining the history of Brethren views on marriage and divorce, only a brief review of their works will be necessary here as background. However, a more detailed look at the current Church of the Brethren statement on divorce, adopted officially by the church in 1977, is in order.<sup>79</sup> In that statement, the role of the faith community as a support to divorced families is emphasized.

#### A Review of Brethren Views on Marriage and Divorce

The history of Brethren views on marriage and divorce are recorded over the years in the minutes of the Church of the Brethren Annual Meeting, now called the Annual Conference. Annual Conference is made up of delegates from each congregation in the Church of the Brethren and is the official policy making body of the church. The first Annual Meeting was held in 1742, with meetings each year since.<sup>80</sup> The Annual Conference is defined as the "highest authority" of the church in all "matters of procedure, program, polity, and discipline."<sup>81</sup> Groff describes the Annual Conference as the most central and unifying element in the church.<sup>82</sup> Roop notes that Annual Conference became the official policy making body of the church for the specific reason of maintaining consistency in policy-making throughout the church.<sup>83</sup> Both Carter and Roop acknowledge the importance of the role of Annual

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<sup>79</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce.

<sup>80</sup>Warren F. Groff, "Polity," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 74.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>83</sup>Roop, "The Brethren and Church Discipline (I)," 94.

Conference in the life of the church and in the development of Brethren positions on marriage and divorce. Annual Conference statements on marriage and divorce can fairly be called the "official" positions of the Brethren on the matter.

As stated in the previous section of this chapter, scriptural accuracy has historically been at the heart of all Brethren life and policy-making. Roop states that while the Brethren discussion of divorce over the years has been considerable and varied, it has centered in large part on the Biblical texts.<sup>64</sup> He notes that the key Biblical passages in Annual Conference minutes have been Rom. 7:1-3, 1 Cor. 7:11, Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9.<sup>65</sup> The debate centered on three issues: Do the scriptures allowed for divorce for any reason whatsoever? Do the scriptures allow divorced persons to continue participation in the church? Do the scriptures allow divorced persons to remarry? These questions have remained unanswered even to the present, though Annual Conferences have frequently debated details of the church's position on marriage and divorce. However, the debate tends to be less emotionally charged today than in the past, with a greater acceptance of divorced persons.<sup>66</sup>

There is no record of divorce among the earliest Brethren. Throughout the nineteenth century divorced persons were not allowed to be members of the church.<sup>67</sup> Roop points to the Annunal Meeting of 1842

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<sup>64</sup>Roop, "The Brethren and Church Discipline (II)," 168.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 168-69.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 168.

<sup>67</sup>Roop, "The Brethren and Church Discipline (I)," 100-1.

as an example of the earliest Brethren position. The Brethren concluded that the death of a spouse was the only situation in which remarriage was allowed by scripture. Though divorce was permitted for the scripturally based reason of unfaithfulness, those who divorced for this reason were not allowed to remarry. Those who violated this position in any way were not allowed to be members of the church.<sup>88</sup>

A change in the Brethren position can be seen in 1933. At that time Annual Conference decided that those who were divorced could be members of the church if they were truly repentant about the divorce, but they could not be in leadership roles.<sup>89</sup> The Brethren believed this change did not overlook the scriptural directives against divorce, as they were still opposed to divorce. The statement holds that Brethren ministers were not allowed to officiate at weddings in which one of the persons had a previous mate who was still living.<sup>90</sup> The change in policy was built upon a rationale of forgiveness for those who had sinned by divorcing, providing they were truly repentant.<sup>91</sup>

In 1964, the Annual Conference affirmed the scriptural directive for lifelong commitment in marriage, but also decided that even divorced ministers and other church leaders should be given forgiveness and compassion when they divorce. Divorce was no longer seen as a reason for ordained clergy or others to leave leadership positions in the

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<sup>88</sup>Roop, "The Brethren and Church Discipline (II)," 170.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>90</sup>Carter, 31.

<sup>91</sup>Roop, "Church Discipline (II)," 174.

church.<sup>92</sup> This report defined the task of the church with divorced persons as a "ministry of forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation," as based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.<sup>93</sup>

The most recent Annual Conference statement on marriage and divorce came in 1977. This statement reaffirmed the 1964 statement and established a view of marriage and divorce as taking place within the "context" of the faith community--the church.<sup>94</sup> The task of the faith community to nurture and care for all persons--married, divorced, remarried, or single--is emphasized.<sup>95</sup> Divorce is said to be necessary at times for the well-being of family members. When divorce occurs the faith community is to care for those in the divorcing family.<sup>96</sup> In this statement the Brethren have taken a vastly different stance than in the 1842 position. Now, instead of excluding divorced persons from the community, the church is to actively include them in the nurturing life of the fellowship.

Carter believes that the changes in Brethren positions are a result of a general acculturation and liberalizing process throughout the history of the church.<sup>97</sup> He reviews theological differences in the church which produced splinter groups of conservative and liberal

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<sup>92</sup>Carter, 31.

<sup>93</sup>Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, 1964. "Minutes of the 178th Recorded Annual Conference," [Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press], 11.

<sup>94</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. I.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid, Sec. III.A.

<sup>97</sup>Carter, 45-50.

elements. Many of these groups left the church to form new fellowships. As a result of the splintering, the main body of the Church of the Brethren has experienced a gradual liberalizing trend of increased openness to new thoughts and influences, with new attitudes toward divorce being one example.<sup>99</sup> In addition, Carter points to an often recognized sociological process among the Brethren of acculturation or adaption to the surrounding culture. One result has been an increase in the numbers of divorce among Brethren and an increased acceptance of divorced persons by the church, reflective of the same process within the larger American culture.<sup>100</sup>

An important development in Brethren statements on marriage and divorce has been in the role of the faith community. Initially, the task of the church was to uphold a strict belief in the sanctity of marriage. Roop demonstrates that the early Brethren used methods of church discipline to maintain the purity and unity of the church against those who sin.<sup>100</sup> A common method of discipline was the practice of "avoidance." The person who sinned was excluded from relationships with faithful ones in the community.<sup>101</sup> If a member divorced or remarried without the approval of the community, they would be "banned" from further contact. Restoration to fellowship was possible only when the sinful person was deemed to be truly repentant for their

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>100</sup>Roop, "The Brethren and Church Discipline (I)," 93.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 96.



wrongdoing.<sup>102</sup> In cases of divorce the faith community was a form of "religious court," determining the sinfulness or acceptability of each divorced person.

The church then entered a period, marked by the 1964 statement, in which Annual Conference intentionally refrained from dealing with specific cases of divorce and began instead to issue guidelines for local congregations to help them deal with divorce and remarriage in the local community.<sup>103</sup> Specifically, pastors of congregations were encouraged to represent the congregation in deciding who they would or would not remarry in ceremonies performed in the church.<sup>104</sup>

However, the 1964 and 1977 Annual Conference statements both call for increased involvement by the local faith community in a healing and reconciling ministry to divorced persons. The 1977 statement, while affirming the 1964 statement, emphasizes the role of the faith community even more emphatically.

#### A Review of the 1977 Annual Conference Statement

A strong interest of this statement is to develop a healing interaction between the faith community and divorced persons. The role of the faith community is not one of judgement, but one of reconciliation. The report is divided into four sections: (1) relationships in the faith community, (2) marriage, (3) divorce, and remarriage, and (4) problems of leadership. The sections on marriage, divorce and the role of the faith community will be highlighted.

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>103</sup>Roop, "The Brethren and Church Discipline (II), 176-77.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 178.

Marriage. Marriage, divorce, and remarriage are seen as existing "within" the faith community, and the faith community is "responsible" for nurturing all members of the community.<sup>105</sup> Marriage is a theologically grounded phenomenon. The creative union between male and female is a gift from God.<sup>106</sup> The marriage bond is likened to God's covenant with humankind--it has God's blessing and is lifelong and enduring.<sup>107</sup> Marriage is that union which allows the full realization of each person's potential and wholeness.<sup>108</sup> The marriage bond is more than a legal bond, it is also a bond of the Spirit, which is deeper and longer lasting than the legal bond.<sup>109</sup>

The statement also acknowledges barriers to health in marriage. Possessiveness and dependency destroy intimacy.<sup>110</sup> "Privatism" is destructive in that couples pull-away from life in community and become exclusive to themselves. They fail to rely on supports around them which enrich marriage by promoting growth. One source of support is the counsel of other couples or persons.<sup>111</sup> The "myth of naturalism" is also destructive. Some persons feel marriage should grow "naturally," without intentional effort. Married persons are encouraged to work

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<sup>105</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. I.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., Sec. II.A.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid. For a further discussion of a Brethren view of the covenantal nature of marriage see: Eugene F. Roop, "Two Become One Become Two," Brethren Life and Thought 21 (Summer 1976): 133.

<sup>108</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. II.A.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., Sec. II.C.

actively for personal and interpersonal growth.<sup>112</sup>

The role of the faith community in the lives of married persons is outlined. The community is to support and challenge married couples toward growth, providing marriage enrichment opportunities as well as opportunities for the growth of each individual.<sup>113</sup> Marriage ceremonies should be devised which encourage the healthful interaction of couple and faith community.<sup>114</sup> Recommendations are listed for the faith community to provide workshops, educational events, and personal growth events which are aimed at enriching marriages. The recommendations are the responsibility of congregations, congregational leaders, pastors, and community resource persons.<sup>115</sup>

The clear intent of the Brethren in this statement is that the faith community be a resource and support to married persons. The situation is much the same for divorced persons.

Divorce. All broken relationships are the concern of the faith community. The focus of the faith community is on both and those marriages which end in divorce and those which suffer a break-down of the relationship but do not end in divorce.<sup>116</sup> The statement recognizes the need for divorce in some cases, "for the well-being of all family members."<sup>117</sup> Even more dramatically, the statement acknowledges that

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., Sec. II.A.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., Sec. II.D.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., Sec. III.A.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

some persons choose for divorce "in light of their faith."<sup>119</sup> That is, for some persons, a part of the decision-making process for divorce is a consideration of what is most faithful in their marital situation. Divorce may be a more faithful act than continuing in "increasingly destructive relationship(s)."<sup>119</sup>

As was mentioned, the covenantal nature of marriage is affirmed. Though the civil contract of marriage is acknowledged and recognized as potentially transient, the enduring spiritual covenant underlying marriage is seen as primary.<sup>120</sup> The enduring impact of marriage is said to continue even after legal divorce. The statement points to the lasting personal effect one spouse has on another as a result of marriage, and hints at the ongoing contact most ex-spouses have with one another.<sup>121</sup> In this author's view, with the distinction between the civil and the covenantal, the statement attempts to resolve the juxtaposition of acceptance of divorce with the historic Brethren view that marriage is sacred and eternal and builds a foundation for the church's continued relationship and care for divorced persons. The faith community may recognize the civil dissolution of marriage, yet still respond to divorced persons because we are all in enduring, lasting relationships with one another.

Through the use of the term "brokenness" as a description for divorce, the 1977 statement affirms the 1964 Annual Conference

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

statement. In 1964, divorce was also compared to brokenness and the church was called to a ministry of "reconciliation" to the divorced.<sup>122</sup> Though not clearly outlined in the 1977 statement, ministry to the divorced appears to be placed in the context of the historic Brethren ministry of peacemaking and reconciliation to all persons who experience brokenness, whatever form that brokenness takes.

In the 1977 statement the faith community is called to, "discover ways in which the church can support, sustain, and redeem the brokenness of the people involved" in divorce.<sup>123</sup> The faith community is encouraged to do this in the context of their corporate life, with inclusion of divorced persons into the interpersonal relationships of the community clearly implied.<sup>124</sup> Importantly, the community is encouraged to find ways for divorced persons to, "affirm the positive aspects of their marriages, make confession, ask forgiveness and recognize their continuing responsibility to any children."<sup>125</sup> Counseling of various kinds is one concrete suggestion to accomplish these tasks. This can be counseling by the pastor, by resource persons in the wider community, or by members of the church, one to another. Counseling for children of divorce is mentioned specifically. The goal of counseling is to help persons understand the reasons for the divorce, resolve their feelings about it, and adjust to life in the

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<sup>122</sup>Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, "Minutes, 178th Annual Conference." 11.

<sup>123</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. III.A.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

future.<sup>126</sup> Other specific tasks are recommended: financial aid, legal help, spiritual guidance, referrals to appropriate helping professionals, support groups, workshops, educational opportunities to help persons adjust to divorce, and education about post-divorce parenting.<sup>127</sup>

The faith community. Reflecting the theology of community, the 1977 statement affirms that Brethren are called by God to be in community. The community is a covenant community and the community informs and influences the lives and lifestyles of those who hear God's call.<sup>128</sup> At the heart of community life is a God-given love for one another. This love is taught to Christians by the example of Christ.<sup>129</sup> God's love also promotes human growth. The "life thrust" of Jesus was toward fulfillment of what persons could become as creations of God.<sup>130</sup> As Christians relate to one another in God's love they become free and trusting, they develop authentic and honest expressions of feelings and thoughts. This form of sharing and growing promotes health and strength in marriages and in all relationships of the community.<sup>131</sup>

As the community and the person are so closely intertwined, when there is lack of health among persons--such as in a troubled

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., Sec. III.A. and C.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., Sec. III.C.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., Sec. I.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

marriage--there is also a lack of health in the "fellowship of believers." Brokenness in families is brokenness in the faith community.<sup>132</sup> Efforts to strengthen the family rightly comes from the faith community which "should provide the nurture and care for the family" as a way of promoting the general health of the community.<sup>133</sup>

To nurture all families the statement recommends that congregations provide growth experiences for persons in areas of human relationships--through Bible studies, educational events, retreats, small groups, workshops and growth counseling.<sup>134</sup> Also, the church should address all aspects of human sexuality, particularly from a Christian perspective.<sup>135</sup>

The statement urges that in times of crises the faith community should not retreat from families or marriages. The model of Jesus is one of caring for those in need.<sup>136</sup> At one point the acknowledgement is made that the church has too often avoided those who experience a crisis in marriage, increasing their feelings of alienation. The church has also too often responded to them legalistically with a greater desire to judge and proclaim sinfulness than to care for the hurting persons.<sup>137</sup>

As an alternative to avoidance or legalism, the faith community

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., Sec. I, Recommendations.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., Sec. I.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

is encouraged to "surround the divorcing persons with love and concern."<sup>138</sup> As the statement defines the faith community as the context of marriage, so too does it define the faith community as the context of caring for divorcing families. The church is encouraged to "support, sustain, and redeem the brokenness" of divorcing persons.<sup>139</sup> The model expressed can once again be described as caregiving through life in the community.

#### Caregiving in Community

But how effective or realistic is this model? Can it be said that the Brethren actually surround the divorcing person with love and concern? In a church with a long history of condemnation for the divorced, is it now possible that Brethren are able to be caring and supportive to those they have historically avoided? Several attempts have been made to explore this issue. A brief review of those studies will be helpful to understand what may happen to children.

In a "Symposium" issue on divorce in the Church of the Brethren, in the journal Brethren Life and Thought, a number of Brethren clergy and laypersons describe their divorce experiences.<sup>140</sup> Most of the authors describe supportive and healing experiences with Brethren congregations. Leland Wilson in particular describes hearing words of support for the value of his ministry, when he had inner doubts about

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid., Sec. III.A.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Brethren Life and Thought 21 (Summer 1976).



the wisdom of his ongoing presence in the pastorate.<sup>141</sup>

Carter found similar results, but also found that support for divorced Brethren clergy is clearly ambivalent. In a survey of clergy who were divorced between 1950 and 1979, Carter found that the clergypersons' own awareness of the 1977 Annual Conference statement, their adherence to its procedures, and their participation in a congregation at the time of their divorce, were all crucial for feeling supported and cared for by the community. Among Carter's findings were these relevant conclusions:

1. Divorced ministers who reported higher levels of awareness of the 1977 Annual Conference statement also reported feeling higher levels of healing from Brethren sources and were more likely to remain in the pastoral ministry following divorce.<sup>142</sup>

2. Divorced ministers who informed persons in their congregations, or their denominational authorities, of the impending divorce at earlier stages of the divorce process, reported feeling more healing and support from Brethren sources than those who informed at later stages.<sup>143</sup>

3. Divorced ministers who followed the prescribed procedures for divorcing clergy which are outlined in the 1977 statement, reported higher levels of healing from Brethren sources.<sup>144</sup> In addition,

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<sup>141</sup>Leland Wilson, "Living in Sin," Brethren Life and Thought 21 (Summer 1976): 147.

<sup>142</sup>Carter, 101.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 103.

divorced clergy reported higher levels of healing from Brethren sources when congregations they were serving followed the prescribed steps for congregations outlined in the 1977 statement.<sup>145</sup>

4. Divorced ministers who were employed by Brethren congregations at the time of their divorce, and who felt those congregations were caring toward them, reported much higher levels of caring generally from Brethren sources than did divorced ministers who were not employed by Brethren congregations at the time of their divorce.<sup>146</sup>

5. Divorced ministers who were actively serving churches at the time of this study reported higher levels of healing and caring from Brethren sources than did divorced ministers whose ordinations status was "inactive," or was "terminated," and were not serving churches.<sup>147</sup>

In spite of the apparant good-will between divorced Brethren clergy and the Church of the Brethren as a whole, Carter also found that the majority of respondents reported finding higher levels of caring from outside the denomination than from inside.<sup>148</sup> And, about one-half of the respondants felt that the guidelines for divorced ministers outlined in the 1977 Annual Conference statement were inadequate for the needs of the situation. That is, the guidelines were insufficient to help churches or ministers respond effectively to the social complexities and emotional intensity of the divorce experience.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

Carter's study appears to imply that the Brethren may give some support to divorcing persons, but greater levels of support are still needed. Divorcing clergy seem to say that the Church of the Brethren has not yet completely realized how stressful and traumatic divorce can be for some persons. The implication is also clear that an active involvement with a local congregation before and after the divorce is vital to receiving support from Brethren congregations.

In a similar study of divorced Brethren clergy, Earl Ziegler found equally ambivalent results. Divorced clergy reported mixed results in feeling they had been supported by their congregations at the time of their divorce. Only slightly more than half of his study group felt supported by their congregation while the remainder felt little or no support.<sup>150</sup> As a result of the divorce, the vast majority of the ministers in this study had left the particular congregation in which they were pastor when the divorce occurred. Significantly, none of the pastors were given a choice of staying or leaving their pastoral position, the congregations made that decision, not the pastor.<sup>151</sup> Finally, Ziegler concluded that the Brethren should work to change their attitudes toward divorced person, including divorced clergy. He found that divorced pastors who had stayed within the "mainstream" of the church, reported difficulty because of the church's attitudes toward divorce.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>Earl K. Ziegler, "Divorce Among the Church of the Brethren Clergy: Role Expectations as Contributory Factors" (D.Min. diss., Lancaster Theological Seminary, 1981), p.63.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 91.

In summary, the Brethren have historically interpreted divorce as sinfulness because it is against biblical norms about the sanctity of marriage. More currently, however, while attempting to remain faithful to biblical values, the Brethren have seen divorce more as brokenness. Marriage is seen as a covenantal relationship, similar to a covenant between God and humankind. As such, divorce is a breaking of covenant. In addition, not only is divorce a brokenness in the marital relationship, it signifies a brokenness in the faith community as well.

In the most current Brethren statements, the faith community is given a crucial role in supporting Brethren who divorce. The model of caregiving through life in the community which is founded in the Brethren theology of community is supported by official Brethren statements on marriage and divorce. The Brethren have committed themselves to be healing and reconciling agents whenever they encounter conflict and brokenness. When divorce occurs the community is instructed to surround divorcing families with reconciling and healing love.

Studies conducted with divorcing clergypersons indicate the Brethren have actually had an ambivalent relationship toward divorcing persons. While some divorced clergy feel support from the community, many do not. As a general rule, divorced Brethren clergy have felt more support from sources outside Brethren congregations. Clearly, studies have found that divorced Brethren clergy have had to take the initiative to maintain a relationship with Brethren communities in order to feel the support of the community.

However, the crucial question remains, how do Brethren feel about

children of divorce? Are children generally recognized as a part of the community? Do Brethren focus on ministry with children? To answer these questions several Brethren statements on Christian Education and ministry with children are invaluable.

#### The Church of the Brethren and Children

In a recent study of early Brethren childrearing practices, Alvin Conner notes that the historical roots which shaped the theology of the church, Anabaptism and Pietism, also shaped early attitudes toward children.<sup>153</sup> The Anabaptist emphasis on obedience and discipline in lifestyle and personal manner could at times create a strict environment for everyone in the community.<sup>154</sup> However, the Anabaptist theology of adult baptism helped to mitigate some of that strict atmosphere for children. The early Brethren believed that children were unable to make important decisions about such things as baptism because they were not fully cognizent of their situation in life. This also meant that children were not held fully responsible for all their childhood actions and misbehaviors.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, the Pietist emphasis on individualism influenced child raising practices by allowing latitude in personal expressions for young people, which was especially important for adolescents.<sup>156</sup>

Conner describes early Brethren as strict parents, often seeking

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<sup>153</sup>Alvin E. Conner, Sectarian Childrearing: The Dunkers, 1708-1900 (Gettysburg: Brethren Heritage, 1988), 10.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 11.

the guidance and rule of the scriptures in matters dealing with children.<sup>157</sup> Yet at the same, Brethren parents were compassionate and loving, often allowing children to learn by their own mistakes.<sup>158</sup>

Children in early Brethren homes were often as much influenced by the ethnic, German culture of Brethren communities, as they were by parents. Brethren homes were often rural, isolated, large, agrarian, and simple.<sup>159</sup> Education was often conducted in the home because of rural isolation and consisted of heavy doses of scripture and religious doctrine.<sup>160</sup> Desmond Bittinger notes that an intentional goal of Brethren homes, in keeping both adults and children isolated, was to remain free from the influences of the world, which the Brethren saw as sinful.<sup>161</sup>

Of crucial importance, the early Brethren clearly saw children as part of their community. In a statement from the 1789 Annual Meeting, which concerned proper methods for instructing children, the Brethren were told that, "the children of the faithful belong to the flock of Christ, just as naturally as the lambs belong to the flock of sheep."<sup>162</sup>

Brethren regard for children through their history can be seen in a variety of caring activities for the welfare of children. In 1812, the

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<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 63-4.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 187.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 111-40.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>161</sup>Desmond W. Bittinger, "Educational Activity," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 92.

<sup>162</sup>Conner, 51.

Annual Meeting instructed the Brethren to care for the children of those widows who were too poor to care for the children themselves.<sup>163</sup> In the 1850s, Brethren congregations instituted Sunday Schools, for children as well as adults.<sup>164</sup> By the early 1900s, most Brethren congregations sponsored Sunday Schools.<sup>165</sup> In 1870, the Brethren began publication of a newspaper for young persons.<sup>166</sup> In the early 1900s, the Brethren founded a number of orphanages and homes for children.<sup>167</sup>

Brethren concern for children is found in recent years as well. Official statements by the Church of the Brethren suggest that Brethren see children as an important part of the community and define the task of caring for children as the responsibility of the community as a whole. The first example is a 1980 Statment of Philosophy, of the Parish Ministries Commission of the Church of the Brethren, a committee of the General Board, which is the dominant administrative body of the denomination. The Parish Ministries commission is concerned with congregational life and ministry.<sup>168</sup> Life in the community of faith is defined as the "teacher," or "nurturer," of children as well as adults. Nurture is that which promotes the growth or development of

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<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>164</sup>Bittinger, "Educational Activity," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 84.

<sup>165</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Recent History," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 32.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>167</sup>David B. Eller, "Social Outreach," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 129.

<sup>168</sup>Groff, "Polity," The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 75.

persons and institutions.<sup>169</sup> Children and adults are seen as co-travelers in one developmental, life-long journey of Christian living. The need to nurture all persons, regardless of age, continues throughout this journey.<sup>170</sup> The needs of all persons are mentioned in the context of family developmental processes. The community is to nurture families at the various stages of development. Importantly, divorce is mentioned as a "variation" that may effect the family process. At such points families are in special need of ministry by the community to facilitate Christian growth and learning at crisis times.<sup>171</sup>

In a 1988 statement of the Annual Conference on the goals of Christian Education in the Church of the Brethren, the total life of the community is defined as Christian Education.<sup>172</sup> All occasions of life together are seen as communications of Christian values; all persons are teachers and all events are opportunities for education.<sup>173</sup> Persons of all ages, children and adults, are tied together in the process of Christian Education.<sup>174</sup> The changing nature of families is acknowledged and divorcing families mentioned specifically, as part of the modern

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<sup>169</sup>Church of the Brethren General Board, "Philosophy Statement of the Parish Ministries Commission," [Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1980], Sec. IV.2.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., Sec. IV.3.1.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., IV.3.2.

<sup>172</sup>Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, 1988, "Christian Education Study Committee Report," [Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press], 5.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 4.



milieu of Christian Education.<sup>175</sup>

In another Christian Education statement, life in the community is seen as the basis for development of educational curriculum.<sup>176</sup>

Curriculum is to be developed or chosen for use in Brethren congregations that "enables communities of faith to embody God's shalom and to be channels through which Christ works."<sup>177</sup> In addition, curriculum is to be developed which is contemporary, is "for all ages," and addresses the "varying environments where people live."<sup>178</sup>

The 1986 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren adopted an extremely useful paper which addresses the conditions of children in American communities and the need for ministries with children by the Brethren. Brethren are said to have a long-standing belief that all persons are "inseparably joined together," and thus Brethren have always had a deep concern for the welfare of children.<sup>179</sup> The statement specifically raises concern over abuse of children, but also mentions the impact of divorce on children. The report points out that divorce is encountered by children in the Church of the Brethren and in the United States as a whole.<sup>180</sup> The traditional Brethren ministries

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<sup>175</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>176</sup>Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, 1986, "Guidelines for Developing and Recommending Curriculum, Nos. 1, 4, 7 [Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1986].

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., No. 1.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., No. 5.

<sup>179</sup>Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, 1986, "Conditions of Childhood in the United States," [Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1986], 1.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 7.

of peacemaking and reconciling are cited as the basis for current ministries to children who live in a broken, violent world. Brethren believe that as children suffer, so too does the church suffer. The historic peacemaking ministry and an awareness of the participation of all persons in the suffering of the world, makes the Brethren uniquely equipped to minister compassionately to children in need.<sup>181</sup>

The statement concludes with several recommendations: (1) include children into every level of life in the church, (2) develop ministries that enhance the well-being of children, (3) educate the church about the conditions of childhood, and (4) develop contacts with resources in local communities which help children.<sup>182</sup> In 1988, the Annual Conference appointed a task force of Brethren persons to implement these recommendations.<sup>183</sup>

However, in light of the Brethren desire to include children in the community and minister to children in need, the question must be asked, do children have feelings of inclusion and support from the church? In a recently published study of Brethren adolescents, sponsored by the denominational magazine Messenger, it was found that Brethren youth generally feel positive about the church and appear to feel included in the life of the community. Cheryl Cayford, who authored the report, noted that some ninety-five percent of Brethren youth attend church activities at least once a week or more and some

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<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 12.

ninty-six percent say they like being Brethren.<sup>184</sup> Approximately eighty percent of the respondents said they expect to be Brethren the rest of their lives, and seventy-two percent say the church is sensitive to youth and issues that are important to youth.<sup>185</sup> The report also found that the majority of Brethren youth agree with traditional Brethren values and bellefs--pacifism, simple living, and service to others.<sup>186</sup> Of great interest, the responding youth said that their mothers and fathers were the persons who most influenced their faith.<sup>187</sup> This finding corresponds with studies which are cited in the next chapter of this thesis on the strong relationship between the religion of children and that of their parents.

In summary, the Brethren clearly have a long-standing concern for the well-being of children. Children have historically been included in the life of the community. Incorporation of young people into the community, religiously and culturally, has been a primary focus of Brethren parenting and education. Recent statements by the Brethren indicate that the interest in children and their welfare remains strong. Further, life in the faith community is seen as the medium of that caregiving. Inclusion of children into the community is highly valued by Brethren and is seen as one means of caring for children who are in need. At least one recent study suggests that Brethren young

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<sup>184</sup>Cheryl Cayford, "Showing the Spirit, Keeping the Faith: Youth in the Church of the Brethren," Messenger 138 (July 1989): 14.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 14-5.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

people respond positively to the Brethren interest in children, showing strong ties and high participation levels by young people in Brethren congregations.

### Conclusion

The underlying interest of this chapter has been to create a definition of the Church of the Brethren as a social support for children of divorce. Crucial steps in this process have been to discover the Brethren intent toward children of divorce and to define those methods which the Brethren would likely use to be supportive of these children. Ample evidence exists to support the conclusion that the Brethren view themselves as a support for children of divorce and see the interpersonal life of the faith community as the means of conveying support. The theology of the church as a faith community, which is central to Brethren identity, has been explored as a foundation for Brethren support of children of divorce. Statements by the Brethren on marriage and divorce have been reviewed and suggest that most recently the Brethren place the divorce event and caregiving to divorcing families within the context of the faith community. Finally, a brief review of Brethren history and attitudes toward children suggests that children have always been seen as part of the faith community. Also, current statements by the Brethren express a desire to be caring of all children, but especially of children with special needs. Children of divorce are mentioned as one group of those children in need of the attention of the church.

For Brethren, the network of relationships in the faith community is the medium by which God's healing and reconciling love become a

reality in the world. Marriage is an enactment of the covenant between persons and God. When divorce occurs the covenant with God is also broken. The task of the faith community in the divorce event is one of reconciliation. Children are indeed seen as full participants in the covenantal relationship and as such are full participants in the concrete expression of God's love. When the brokenness of divorce is felt, Brethren desire to heal the brokenness with the children of the community as well.

Historically, the Brethren stance toward those who divorce has been to limit their participation in the faith community. This was done in a desire to minimize the rift between God and persons and maintain the pure faithfulness of the believers in the community. More recently, particularly since 1933, the Brethren have desired to include the divorced in the community in order to allow the community to be a reconciling agent to "restore" the covenant between God and the divorced. Even more recently, since the 1977 statement, the Brethren have seen the divorced as representative of brokenness in the community, rather than an introduction of brokenness into the community. In fact, pointedly, the Brethren acknowledge that on occasion faith is expressed by persons in the midst of divorce. Such an admission appears to be subtle expression by the Brethren that even in divorce, as the covenant between persons is being dissolved, the covenant between God and persons remains.

This author has attempted to outline three elements of the Brethren theology of community: the common identity, the common discipline, and the common mission. No longer do Brethren see divorce as a break in the

bond of the faith community. Brethren appear to be professing the belief that in the divorce process the task of the faith community is to reaffirm the bond between all persons--divorced and non-divorced. That affirmation is in large part the reconciling activity. As Brethren affirm the connectedness of all persons, including the divorced, they also reaffirm their common task of discipline. The goal of the faith community in the divorce event is to be faithfully responsive to God. That is, in this event as in all others, to respond according to God's leading. In this activity, the divorced and non-divorced join together to discern that which is meaningful and directive in the divorce event for shaping their ongoing common faith journey. Finally, as the Brethren affirm their common identity and unite for common discipline, they also join together--divorced and non-divorced--for common healing. Brethren clearly feel that everyone in the faith community feels brokenness in the divorce event. Thus, those activities of ministry for the divorced are healing for divorced and non-divorced alike. As the community seeks to offer reconciling healing to the divorced, the community itself is reconciled.

The model of caregiving for children of divorce through life in the faith community is unique and valuable. However, its effectiveness needs to be tested. Such a model is contrary to the general finding that divorce is often accompanied by a disorganization of the entire social network of the divorced family. An essential question must be asked: Do divorced persons in the Church of the Brethren, including children, maintain contact with the church? Research would suggest that they may not. The survey reported in this thesis examines this very

issue. Before turning to that survey, however, a further explanation needs to be made of how the theology of community shapes the survey and how the model of caregiving through life in the community was tested.

The survey measures the presence of each of the three elements of the theology of community in the relationship between children of divorce and Church of the Brethren congregations. The common identity was measured through questions which attempt to discern the level at which children of divorce feel included in the relational network and ministry activities of their congregation. The measurement was carried out by examining the child's reported level of activity in the congregation and their feelings and perceptions of being a part of the life of the congregation. The common discipline was measured through the feelings of the child that the church is important to them in day to day living. That is, they were asked whether the congregation was important or helpful to them for their day to day living? Finally, the common mission was measured by the level of the child's participation in the specific activities of the church and in participation in any ministries aimed specifically at supporting children of divorce or their families.

However, before turning directly to a discussion of the survey results, further explanation of the survey methodology is in order. Specifically, a foundation needs to be laid to support the methods of measuring these three elements of Brethren community and caregiving.

## CHAPTER 4

### Social Supports, Crises and Children of Divorce

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss a number of the issues underlying the empirical research of the thesis. Initially, there is a further discussion of the role of social supports in crisis events, including the crisis of divorce. Following that, a more detailed definition of social support is developed, including an explanation of how social supports are measured. Because one element of social support measurement is children's activity level in the church, the chapter includes a discussion of existant literature examining the effects of divorce on religious affiliation and church attendance. In this same vein, there is a review of the literature which documents the powerful influence which parents have on the religious affiliation and activity of their children. Finally, the chapter describes the Church of the Brethren as a study group, noting the social homogeneity of Brethren congregations as a natural control for a number of demographic variables.

#### Social Supports and Crises

Research studies suggest that when adults experience a crisis they often turn to some form of social support for help. Bradford Brown found that among adults who experience a life-transition or crisis,



two-thirds make use of social supports to cope with the event.<sup>1</sup> Informal supports such as relatives and friends are relied upon most heavily, especially in non-medical crises.<sup>2</sup> Enrico Quarantelli found that victims of natural disasters--floods, earthquakes, fires--usually turn to their family network as a first step of recovery.<sup>3</sup> George Coelho and others found that a crucial factor in the successful adjustment to college life of first year students is the establishment of a friendship network among fellow students.<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Kammeyer and Charles Bolton discovered that persons who experience mental health crises often turn initially to their friendship network as a first step in determining which therapist or mental health clinic they will subsequently contact for treatment.<sup>5</sup> James House and Cynthia Robbins speculate that social supports are so vital, that the lack of a supportive social network in itself may be harmful to well-being.<sup>6</sup>

The general efficacy of social supports for persons in crises has

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<sup>1</sup>B. Bradford Brown, "Social and Psychological Correlates of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Urban Adults," American Journal of Community Psychology, 6 (1978): 431.

<sup>2</sup>Bradford Brown, 431.

<sup>3</sup>Enrico L. Quarantelli, "A Note on the Protective Function of the Family in Disasters," Marriage and Family Living 22 (Aug. 1960): 263.

<sup>4</sup>George V. Coelho, David A. Hamburg, and Elizabeth B. Murphey, "Coping Strategies in a New Learning Environment," Archives of General Psychiatry 9 (Nov. 1963): 438.

<sup>5</sup>Kenneth C.W. Kammeyer and Charles D. Bolton, "Community and Family Factors Related to the Use of a Family Service Agency," Journal of Marriage and the Family 30 (Aug. 1968): 497.

<sup>6</sup>James S. House and Cynthia Robbins, "Age, Psychosocial Stress, and Health," Aging in Society, eds. Matilda White Riley, Beth B. Hess, and Kathleen Bond (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1983), 192.

also been demonstrated. In the study cited above, Coelho and others found that friends or friendship groups were vital in helping college students successfully cope with an academic failure.<sup>7</sup> Marjorie Lowenthal and Clayton Haven found that among older persons, good morale and stable mental health is greatly enhanced by a relationship with at least one intimate friend.<sup>8</sup> In a paradoxical demonstration of the value of social supports, Christopher Tolsdorf found that a characteristic of psychiatric patients is lessened contact and trust for social intimates and resources.<sup>9</sup> In the same vein, Kammeyer and Bolton found that isolation from social supports contributes to the onset of problems and crises in some families.<sup>10</sup> Brown determined that even an awareness of the availability of social supports is stress reducing for most people, even when the supports are unused.<sup>11</sup>

#### Divorce and Social Supports

Studies also suggest that divorced persons rely heavily on social supports. Chiriboga and others found that more than eighty percent of the adults who divorce turn to social supports to help them adjust to the divorce.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the greater the amount of stress felt by the

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<sup>7</sup>Coelho, Hamburg, and Murphey, 439.

<sup>8</sup>Marjorie Fiske Lowenthal and Clayton Haven, "Interaction and Adaption: Intimacy as a Critical Variable," American Sociological Review 35 (Feb. 1968): 25-6.

<sup>9</sup>Christopher C. Tolsdorf, "Social Networks, Support, and Coping: An Exploratory Study," Family Process 15 (Dec. 1976): 415.

<sup>10</sup>Kammeyer and Bolton, 497.

<sup>11</sup>Bradford Brown, 438.

<sup>12</sup>Chiriboga, et al., 123.

divorcing person, the more likely they are to seek support.<sup>13</sup> Such support might be as informal as talking to friends and children, or as formal as seeking professional psychotherapy and legal counsel.<sup>14</sup> Chiriboga learned that divorcing persons rely heavily on informal supports and find them more helpful than formal supports.<sup>15</sup> Wallerstein and Kelly found that almost half of the divorced women in their study had entered personal psychotherapy in the first year following separation.<sup>16</sup> Stan Albrecht and others learned that social support from the family of origin increases following divorce, as divorcing adults at times increase their level of contact with families in the period immediately following divorce.<sup>17</sup>

However, the efficacy of social supports with divorced persons may not be as great as it is for non-divorced persons. Colletta found that divorced mothers are generally less satisfied with the helpfulness of social supports than are mothers from two-parent families.<sup>18</sup> Colletta concludes that divorced mothers feel such intense needs for support that all supports seem inadequate.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Chiriboga, et al., 121.

<sup>14</sup>Bradford Brown, 431.

<sup>15</sup>Chiriboga, et al., 134.

<sup>16</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 155.

<sup>17</sup>Stan L. Albrecht, Howard M. Bahr and Kristen L. Goodman, Divorce and Remarriage: Problems, Adaptations, and Adjustments (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983), 130.

<sup>18</sup>Nancy Donohue Colletta, "Support Systems After Divorce: Incidence and Impact," Journal of Marriage and the Family 41 (Nov. 1979): 844.

<sup>19</sup>Colletta, "Support Systems After Divorce," 844.

In addition, while divorced persons seek out social supports, they may not be readily available. Colletta found that single, divorced mothers receive less support overall than do mothers from two parent families. Divorced mothers must often rely on community services (welfare, food stamps, day care, etc.), while mothers in two-parent households receive more support from family and friends.<sup>20</sup> Wallerstein and Kelly found that supports are generally unavailable to divorced persons throughout the divorce and readjustment process.<sup>21</sup>

Children of divorce also appear to find few supports. Wallerstein and Kelly found that approximately three-quarters of the children in their study had never talked about the divorce with anyone in their extended family--grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.<sup>22</sup> Less than ten percent of the children received help from any other adult--counselor, friend, teacher, scout leader, and so on. This lack of support was found to be true of all social settings and institutions.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of their unavailability, children of divorce appear to need and desire supports. Janice Hammond found that among children of divorce, eighty-seven percent say that talking to a counselor about the divorce would be helpful.<sup>24</sup> Richard Benedek and Elissa Bendek outline three support needs of children: (1) advance education about divorce

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<sup>20</sup>Colletta, "Support Systems After Divorce," 839-40.

<sup>21</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 309.

<sup>22</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 43.

<sup>23</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 44.

<sup>24</sup>Hammond, 392.

and its consequences, (2) goal-directed counseling to solve concrete problems brought on by divorce, and (3) visitation or custody mediation with parents to help keep children "out of the middle" of parental conflict.<sup>25</sup>

### Social Supports Defined

Social supports are defined in the literature in a way that distinguishes them from other forms of personal or human resources. Often they are defined in contrast to the individual's psychological strengths or learned problem solving skills. Social supports are seen as external to the person and are derived from interpersonal networks.

In an extremely helpful article, Leonard Pearlin and Carmi Schooler define three categories of coping resources--social resources, psychological resources and specific coping responses.<sup>26</sup> They define coping as, "those things that people do to avoid being harmed by life-strains."<sup>27</sup> Coping resources are those relationships, personal traits, or activities which increase the person's ability to successfully avoid the harmful effects of stressors.<sup>28</sup> Pearlin and Schooler use the terms strains and stressors interchangeably to refer to those problems that have the "potential for arousing threat" or

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<sup>25</sup>Richard S. Benedek and Elissa P. Benedek, "Children of Divorce: Can We Meet Their Needs?" Journal of Social Issues 35 (Fall 1979): 157-58.

<sup>26</sup>Leonard I. Pearlin and Carmi Schooler, "The Structure of Coping," Journal of Health and Social Behavior 19 (Mar. 1978): 5.

<sup>27</sup>Pearlin and Schooler, 2.

<sup>28</sup>Pearlin and Schooler, 5.

feelings of emotional turmoil and distress.<sup>29</sup> Social resources, which are the focus of this thesis, are those coping resources which are found within the person's relational network--family, friends, fellow workers, neighbors--which help lessen the harmful effects of a stressor or life-strain.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, psychological resources are those internal and individual "personality characteristics" which enable the person to deal with stressors.<sup>31</sup> And, coping responses are concrete problem solving behaviors and skills which an individual employs to lessen the harmful effects of a stressor.<sup>32</sup>

Gerald Caplan notes that persons are constantly in a variety of ongoing supportive relationships which help meet a wide range of personal and social needs. Such needs might be for intimacy and social contact, satisfying work, professional services or spiritual fulfillment.<sup>33</sup> Often these relationships are ongoing and enduring, as in marriage or professional functioning, and may be relied on daily as well as in temporary crises.<sup>34</sup> Caplan believes that the purpose of social supports is for the "augmenting of a person's strengths to facilitate his (or her) mastery of his (or her) environment."<sup>35</sup>

Caplan distinguishes three elements of social support:

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<sup>29</sup>Pearlin and Schooler, 3-4.

<sup>30</sup>Pearlin and Schooler, 5.

<sup>31</sup>Pearlin and Schooler, 5.

<sup>32</sup>Pearlin and Schooler, 5.

<sup>33</sup>Caplan, 5.

<sup>34</sup>Caplan, 6.

<sup>35</sup>Caplan, 7.

mobilization of the person's own psychological resources, sharing tasks that must be completed, and providing concrete resources such as money, skills, guidance, tools, etc.<sup>36</sup> He writes that social supports may operate in two ways: to offer guidance and direction, or, to serve as a refuge and sanctuary for the person to retreat from a stressful event or environment.<sup>37</sup>

Of great help for the purposes of this thesis, Caplan defines the term support system. As will be noted, a religious organization or church is clearly defined in Caplan's thought as a support system.

I use the term 'system' to emphasize that we mean more than an occasional or fortuitous relationship or aspect of a social association. Support system implies an enduring pattern of continuous or intermittent ties that play a significant part in maintaining the psychological and physical integrity of the individual over time.<sup>38</sup>

He lists four forms of support systems: (1) spontaneous or natural systems such as families, neighborhoods, and work groups; (2) organized supports not directed by professionals such as volunteer groups; Alcoholics Anonymous, and the American Association of Retired Persons, (3) organized supports directed by professionals such as community mental health networks and Visiting Nurses; and (4) religious organizations.<sup>39</sup> The unique characteristic of the religious organization or church is that it often meets the common needs of daily living within a context of significant spiritual and ethical beliefs.

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<sup>36</sup>Caplan, 6.

<sup>37</sup>Caplan, 6.

<sup>38</sup>Caplan, 7.

<sup>39</sup>Caplan, 8-32.

The spiritual or ethical beliefs offer guidance to the person for daily living and problem solving, interpreting the larger meanings of events, while the interpersonal network of the religious organization provides fulfillment of friendship and intimacy needs. There are also those occasions, according to Caplan, when the religious organization offers more concrete supports such as food, clothing, housing, etc.<sup>40</sup> Caplan also sees it as unique that members of religious organizations participate in ceremonial events which reinforce beliefs and reinforce the importance of giving and receiving supports within that particular support system.<sup>41</sup>

Other definitions of social support found in the literature focus more on the function of supports in crisis events. Most of these definitions, though, are similar to those described above. Brown defines "support systems" as any persons or organizations who undergird the person by "helping (them) adjust to troublesome transitions and unexpected crises."<sup>42</sup> Chiriboga and others define social supports simply as "mediators" which ease the stress of transitions and crises.<sup>43</sup>

Brown makes a distinction between formal and informal supports. Formal supports are recognized, professional persons or agencies such as psychotherapists, physicians, lawyers, social service programs, mental health clinics, etc.<sup>44</sup> Informal supports are spouses, friends,

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<sup>40</sup>Caplan, 25.

<sup>41</sup>Caplan, 25.

<sup>42</sup>Brown, "Social and Psychological Correlates," 425.

<sup>43</sup>Chiriboga et al., 121.

<sup>44</sup>Bradford Brown, 428.



neighbors, relatives, peers, etc.<sup>45</sup> Brown notes that research often measures only the use of formal supports, giving an incomplete understanding of the use of social supports. Informal supports are most often the primary source of support for day to day living as well as for crises.<sup>46</sup>

Brown uses the term "help-seeking," to define the activity of individuals in crisis who take initiative to find sources of social support. He defines help-seeking as the pattern and frequency of contact with support persons or agencies initiated by the person in crisis.<sup>47</sup> Brown discovered four types of help-seekers: those who seek formal supports, those who seek informal supports, those who seek both, and those who seek no support (nonsupport-seekers).<sup>48</sup>

In summary, social supports are defined as those relationships, agencies, institutions, or service programs that are found within or through the relational network of the person, which help mediate or ease the threat and stress of life events or crises. Social supports may be the services of formally recognized helping persons and agencies or they may be the relationships and helping acts received through the informal web of family, friends and neighbors. Social supports are external to the person, distinguished from internal, psychological resources or the activities and problem solving skills employed by the person to cope with stressors. Social supports are often obtained through ongoing

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<sup>45</sup>Bradford Brown, 429.

<sup>46</sup>Bradford Brown, 427.

<sup>47</sup>Bradford Brown, 36.

<sup>48</sup>Bradford Brown, 426-27.

systems of interpersonal relationships and may be relied on frequently or infrequently. The church can be seen as one form of ongoing support system that offers support within the context of a meaningful system of beliefs which provides guidance and interprets the meaning of normal daily events and crises.

Applying these definitions to this project, the focus of this thesis is on those resources found in the relational network of the child of divorce, specifically those found as a result of their ongoing relationship with a local church congregation, which help the child avoid the harmful effects of parental divorce. Even more specifically, the focus is upon those resources which the child of divorce encounters through participation in the life of a Church of the Brethren congregation.

#### Operational Definitions

The availability and use of social supports are defined operationally in the literature in a variety of ways. A brief review of these operational definitions is helpful to further understand the concept of social supports and to understand how their availability and use is measured. This is an important foundation for the methods of measurement used in the survey of this thesis. Because the survey methodology and questionnaires used in this thesis were developed by this author and have heretofore been unused, an attempt to validate their design on the basis of exsistant literature is necessary.

A number of research projects measured the use of social supports in a variety of life events and circumstances. Lowenthal and Haven recorded the number of self-reported role-fulfillments (parent, spouse,

volunteer, worker, etc.) and self-reported level of social interaction to measure the amount of social supports available to elderly persons. Lowenthal and Haven believe that as the number of roles and level of interaction increases, so too does the amount of support.<sup>49</sup> Tolsdorf asked psychiatric patients to simply list the various persons in their relational network, asking the patients to indicate the different ways they came into contact with each person (co-worker, relative, neighbor, etc.) and the number of contacts had with them in the previous year. The number of relationships, frequency of contact and the nature of the relationships were seen to be measurements of the support available in the social network.<sup>50</sup> Brown simply asked persons to list the individuals and agencies they contacted following a crisis as an indication of help-seeking behavior.<sup>51</sup>

Other projects measured the use of social supports following divorce. Spicer and Hampe recorded mutual home visits with members of the nuclear and extended family to measure the effects of divorce on family interaction and support available through the kinship network.<sup>52</sup> Anspach asked divorced persons to report the number of contacts had with relatives in the week prior to the research interview as a method of measuring support received from the extended family.<sup>53</sup> Helen Raschke, in a study of the effect of social interaction on the stress

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<sup>49</sup>Lowenthal and Haven, 22.

<sup>50</sup>Tolsdorf, 408.

<sup>51</sup>Bradford Brown, 428.

<sup>52</sup>Spicer and Hampe, 114.

<sup>53</sup>Anspach, 325.

level of divorced persons, used self-reported participation in friendships, dating, clubs, and churches as a measurement of social interaction.<sup>54</sup> Chiriboga and others interviewed divorced persons using a simple check-list, to ask which community resources were used and to evaluate the helpfulness of each resource.<sup>55</sup> Colletta interviewed divorced mothers, simply asking them which resources had helped them in their parenting tasks following divorce.<sup>56</sup> Gay C. Kitson and others used divorced persons self-reported perceptions of changes in kinship and interpersonal relationships as a measurement of changes in social interactions and available social supports.<sup>57</sup> Albrecht and others used self-reported changes in participation in organizations and clubs following divorce as a measurement of the effects of divorce on social participation.<sup>58</sup>

Several common elements of these operational definitions can be noted. First, self-reports appear to be commonly accepted as valid documentation of contact with social supports. No project was found which attempted to verify the number of self-reported contacts through subsequent contact with the social support source. Second, the number of contacts with social supports were a commonly used measurement of

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<sup>54</sup>Helen J. Raschke, "The Role of Social Participation in Postseparation and Postdivorce Adjustment," Journal of Divorce 1 (Winter 1977): 131-32.

<sup>55</sup>Chiriboga, et al., 122-23.

<sup>56</sup>Colletta, "Support Systems After Divorce," 838.

<sup>57</sup>Gay C. Kitson, et al., "Divorcees and Widows: Similarities and Differences," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 50 (April 1980): 293-94.

<sup>58</sup>Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman, 129.

social support. No attempts were made to document whether support was actually given to the person. Third, checklists were often used to measure social supports. Direct questions about specific supports were not viewed as a biasing factor.

As was outlined in Chapter 3, the survey of this thesis measures four elements of social supports in Church of the Brethren congregations: (1) activity level of the child, (2) involvement in interpersonal relationships in the congregation, (3) emotional attachment to the congregation, and (4) the number of specific support ministries received by the child from the congregation. The literature cited above supports measurement of a child's level of contact with the church, their contact with the interpersonal network, and the specific support ministries received as measurements of social supports. However, as Caplain notes, the church is unique as a social support because of the belief system that surrounds the giving and receiving of supports. To measure this element of support the survey included questions that are categorized as measurements of "emotional attachment." These questions attempt to document both the child's emotional bonding with the church and the usefulness of the belief system of the church. Emotional attachment was measured through such questions as, "Do you feel good when you are with the people in your church?" Or, to document the child's feeling that the belief system of the church is incorporated into their day to day living, the question was asked, "Do you ever talk to anyone at your church about things that are important to you?"

However, it must again be noted that the literature raises doubts

about the role of the church as a social support for divorcing families, children or adults. Churches which have historically opposed divorce may have difficulty supporting divorced persons or family members. Also, it may be difficult for the church to supply at sufficient levels the kinds of support needed by divorcing families. To understand this further it is necessary to review the literature on this issue and then discuss the Church of the Brethren specifically as a social support.

#### Social Support and the Church

As was mentioned in a previous chapter, Wallerstein and Kelly found that fewer than five percent of the children in their study had ever talked to a clergyperson about their parents' divorce.<sup>39</sup> Chiriboga and others found that clergypersons were among the least used and least helpful of all social support persons, as rated by divorcing adults.<sup>40</sup> Colletta discovered that churches, synagogues, and church related organizations were among the least used of all social agencies or institutions by divorcing mothers.<sup>41</sup> In yet another study, David Chiriboga, John Roberts, and Judith Stein, found that religion does not appear to be a significant factor in the overall psychological well-being of divorced persons. That is, among a random sample of divorced persons, those who identified themselves as religious persons, were found to have the same levels of happiness and psychological well-being as those who identified themselves as having no religious

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<sup>39</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 43.

<sup>40</sup>Chiriboga et al., 124-26.

<sup>41</sup>Colletta, "Support Systems After Divorce," 841.

feelings or beliefs.<sup>62</sup> Fred Johnson, a pastoral counselor, suggests that one cause for the lack of involvement by the church in caring for children of divorce is that little theoretical or programmatic theory building has been done by the church in this area, giving little informed direction for ministry.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, other studies, some which have previously been cited, suggest a different conclusion. In a study of clergy who work institutionally with divorcing families, Judith Weinglass and others found that some clergy have significant knowledge of divorce-related issues and are actively involved in caring for the psychological and social well-being of divorced families.<sup>64</sup> These were clergypersons who work in religious "courts" (Roman Catholic and Jewish), or other denominationally related agencies established to work with divorcing persons of that particular faith group. These clergy viewed the welfare of children as a priority and worked intentionally with children in the families they contacted.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, one of the ways they were helpful to children was to convince former spouses to cooperate with one another in matters which concerned children to minimize children's feelings of being "caught in the middle" between

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<sup>62</sup>David A. Chiriboga, John Roberts, and Judith A. Stein, "Psychological Well-Being During Marital Separation," Journal of Divorce 2 (Fall 1978): 21.

<sup>63</sup>Fred Johnson, "Children of Divorce: A Pastoral Care Approach," Pastoral Psychology 33 (Spring 1985): 200.

<sup>64</sup>Judith Weinglass, Kenneth Kressel, and Morton Deutsch, "The Role of the Clergy in Divorce: An Exploratory Survey," Journal of Divorce 2 (Fall 1978): 57.

<sup>65</sup>Weinglass, Kressel, and Deutsch, 69.

parents.<sup>66</sup>

This same study goes on to point out that clergypersons have advantages, unique to their role as clergy, which can make them especially helpful to divorcing families--clergy can initiate contact, clergy can operate more informally, oftentimes clergy are easily trusted, and people accept reassurance more easily from clergypersons.<sup>67</sup>

While the clergy in this study did tend to have negative feelings about divorce itself, which may be common to many clergypersons, they nevertheless appeared to be helpful to divorcing families. Unfortunately, the study group in this research was small, twenty-one clergy, making it difficult to draw conclusions about clergy in general. Still, the research does indicate that some clergypersons do have the potential to be quite helpful to divorcing families.<sup>68</sup>

In support of this view, in a study cited in Chapter 2, Camplain and others demonstrate that clergy are rated by divorcing adults as one of the strongest sources of emotional support and divorce-related information when dealing with child custody decisions.<sup>69</sup> Also, as cited in Chapter 2, at least one clergyperson, Ardean Goertzen, devised a divorce ceremony for use in churches which was found to be very helpful in at least one case study.<sup>70</sup>

This author believes that at least two factors can be isolated

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<sup>66</sup>Weinglass, Kressel, and Deutsch, 68.

<sup>67</sup>Weinglass, Kressel, and Deutsch, 70-2.

<sup>68</sup>Weinglass, Kressel, and Deutsch, 82.

<sup>69</sup>Camplain, Stolberg, and Worthington, 264-65.

<sup>70</sup>Goertzen, 233.



which may explain the contrasting conclusions in the literature on the helpfulness of the church to divorcing families. The first is the religious affiliation of the family prior to divorce. A reasonable assumption might be made that divorcing families who have a higher level of religious affiliation and attendance prior to the divorce are more likely to find the clergy person, and the church as a whole, more helpful and comforting than families who have had no prior relationship to the church. The Weinglass study mentioned above supports this view. Clergy persons who worked with actively religious persons appeared to be quite helpful.<sup>71</sup> Studies which conclude that divorced persons or families find little help from the church do not appear to take into account the possibility that many of these same persons may not have found help from the church, or even been involved in the church, prior to the divorce.

The second factor is the effect of divorce on participation in the church by divorcing persons. Many studies have examined the relationship between religious affiliation on divorce rates. Few studies, if any, reverse these variables to measure the impact of divorce on religious affiliation. A second reasonable assumption is that persons whose relationship with the church is disrupted or ends following divorce, for whatever reason, are less likely to find the church helpful and supportive in adjusting to divorce. This is important for a church such as the Church of the Brethren whose theology of caregiving is based upon a paradigm of reconciling interpersonal relationships. If divorce disrupts the relational network of the

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<sup>71</sup>Weinglass, Kressel, and Deutsch, 59.

church, it also disrupts the caregiving of the church with divorcing persons. Also, it should be noted that divorce may cause persons to be less active in the church, but that may have nothing to do with the beliefs or attitudes toward divorce held by the church. Divorced persons may become less active in the church because the family moves to a new home, or parents begin school or work, or perhaps parental visitations takes children to different homes and communities on weekends. All of this would suggest that the church may be less able to be supportive of divorcing families. To develop this point further it is important to first briefly review the general literature on this issue--the effects of divorce on religious affiliation and church attendance.

#### Divorce and Religious Affiliation

Traditionally, there has been a strong relationship between denominational affiliation and divorce rates. Larry Bumpass and James Sweet note that Jewish couples have historically had the lowest divorce rates, followed by Roman Catholics and then Protestants. Among Protestant couples, Episcopalians have the highest divorce rates, followed by Baptists and Fundamentalists. Lutherans and "other Protestants" have had divorce rates similar to Roman Catholics.<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, the religious affiliation of the wife is a stronger predictor of marital stability than is that of the husband.<sup>73</sup> Couples with no religious affiliation, or with "mixed" religious affiliation,

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<sup>72</sup>Larry L. Bumpass and James A. Sweet, "Differentials in Marital Instability: 1970," American Sociological Review 37 (Dec. 1972): 758.

<sup>73</sup>Bumpass and Sweet, 759.

were found to have higher divorce rates than any religious group.<sup>74</sup>

However, the relationship between denominational affiliation and divorce rate appears to have changed in recent times. Current studies suggest that the rate of divorce varies little across denominational lines. In a more recent study, Tim Heaton and Kristen Goodman found that divorce rates are similar for persons of a wide variety of religious perspectives, liberal to conservative.<sup>75</sup> Wesley Shrum found that religious affiliation is not a singularly significant factor in predicting marital stability.<sup>76</sup> He did find that frequency of religious activity and ethnic group when coupled with religious affiliation did predict divorce rates.<sup>77</sup>

Other researchers have also found that frequency of participation in church activities rather than religious affiliation is a more reliable predictor of marital stability. George Levinger found that couples who attend church more frequently are less likely to separate or divorce.<sup>78</sup> In fact, Albrecht and others even found that those couples whose weddings took place in a church setting are more likely to have stable marriages.<sup>79</sup> Heaton and Goodman found that

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<sup>74</sup>Bumpass and Sweet, 758.

<sup>75</sup>Tim B. Heaton and Kristen L. Goodman, "Religion and Family Formation," Review of Religious Research 26 (1985): 348-349.

<sup>76</sup>Wesley Shrum, "Religion and Marital Instability: Change in the 1970's," Review of Religious Research 21 (Spring 1980): 141.

<sup>77</sup>Shrum, 144.

<sup>78</sup>George Levinger, "Marital Cohesiveness and Dissolution: An Integrative Review," Journal of Marriage and the Family 27 (Feb. 1965): 24-5.

<sup>79</sup>Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman, 81.

within all religious groups, those persons who attend church activities frequently have a much lower divorce rate than those who are infrequent attenders.<sup>80</sup> Shrum found that people who attend church at less frequent rates were two and one-half times more likely to divorce than those who attended church activities at higher rates.<sup>81</sup>

However, as mentioned earlier, these studies look at the effects of church affiliation or frequency of attendance on divorce rate. The literature is inconclusive about the effects of divorce on religious affiliation. Some studies suggest that divorce has only a minimal impact upon relationships with the church, as measured by affiliation or attendance. In studies which investigate persons who "drop-out" of the church, divorce is not found to be a significant cause of dis-affiliation. In fact, Everett Perry and others found that among persons who have left the church, the percentage of divorced persons is no different than the percentage of divorced persons in the general population.<sup>82</sup> Perry found that divorce was seldom mentioned by church "drop-outs" as a reason for leaving the church.<sup>83</sup> David Roozen found that people tend to leave the church following any major life change.<sup>84</sup> He found that divorce, marriage, or remarriage were all equally likely

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<sup>80</sup>Heaton and Goodman, 351.

<sup>81</sup>Shrum, 142.

<sup>82</sup>Everett L. Perry, et al., "Toward a Typology of Unchurched Protestants," Review of Religious Research 21 (Supplement 1980): 393.

<sup>83</sup>Perry, et al., 397.

<sup>84</sup>David A. Roozen, "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry," Review of Religious Research 21 (Supplement 1980): 438.

to bring about a lessened involvement in the church. Other life changes--change in residence or poor health--were as likely to bring about lessened involvement in the church as was divorce.<sup>65</sup> In fact, Perry and others found that some church drop-outs list separation or divorce as one of the reasons they might return to active church participation, a small number saying that a divorce recovery group might draw them back to the church.<sup>66</sup>

Some evidence would suggest that divorce has only minimal impact on the relationship between children and the church. Dean Hoge and Gregory Petrillo found that among adolescents who are critical of the church, negative feelings about past religious training, dislike of religious leaders, and feeling rejected socially by other church youth were the predominant sources for their rejection of the church. Marital status of the parents did not appear to have an influence on adolescent's feelings toward the church.<sup>67</sup>

However, in marked contrast to these findings, a Canadian study found that for small sectarian groups the divorce rate may yet be tied to religious affiliation. And, for these groups, once divorce has occurred it may lessen the strength of affiliation and frequency of attendance. Leo Driedger and others found the divorce rate among Canadian Mennonites was much lower than the divorce rate for all other

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<sup>65</sup>Roozen, 438.

<sup>66</sup>Perry, et al., 399-401.

<sup>67</sup>Dean R. Hoge and Gregory H. Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 17 (Dec. 1978): 376.

mainline Protestant and Catholic groups.<sup>88</sup> This is an important study to this thesis because of the close affinity between the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonites. Both groups grow out of a similar Anabaptist heritage and hold a number of beliefs in common. Today, the Brethren and Mennonites work cooperatively at the denominational level on a number of joint projects.

Driedger and others concluded that among sectarian groups, values surrounding marriage and family life may be more faithfully held. In support of this view is the finding of Heaton and Goodman that among Mormon families, another group with "sectarian" flavor, the divorce rate is also much lower than for mainline Protestants and Catholics.<sup>89</sup> Faith-groups with both a strong group identity and an emphasis on the sanctity of marriage appear to have lower divorce rates. Driedger writes, "this suggests that the continuing strength of ethnic, family and small group ties, especially when combined with strong religious commitment, still act to inhibit divorce."<sup>90</sup>

Divorce appears to weaken the ties between the family and the church in Mennonite congregations. Among inactive Mennonite adults the divorce rate is three times higher than it is among active Mennonite adults.<sup>91</sup> Driedger and others speculate that divorced Mennonites feel "compelled" to leave the church because of the strong values of marriage

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<sup>88</sup>Leo Driedger, Michael Yoder and Peter Sawatzky, "Divorce Among the Mennonites: Evidence of Family Breakdown," Mennonite Quarterly Review 59 (Oct. 1985): 374.

<sup>89</sup>Heaton and Goodman, 355.

<sup>90</sup>Driedger, Yoder, and Sawatzky, 373.

<sup>91</sup>Driedger, Yoder, and Sawatzky, 379.

and family in the church.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most important finding of this study for this thesis is the reported effects of divorce on the relationship between the church and Mennonite adolescents. Mennonite adolescents from divorced homes are much less likely to attend church services and activities than are youth from intact families.<sup>23</sup> Mennonite youth from divorced homes are also less likely to be in agreement with traditional Mennonite beliefs than are youth from intact homes.<sup>24</sup>

Because Mennonites and Brethren are similar in heritage and beliefs, tentative conclusions about Brethren grow out of this study. First, it would be reasonable to expect that the divorce rate for Brethren would be somewhat lower than the general divorce rate in the United States. No study could be found by this author which measured divorce rates in the Church of the Brethren. In fact, in personal correspondence with Robert Faus, Ministry Consultant to the Church of the Brethren, this author was informed that no such studies were known to exist.<sup>25</sup> The divorce rate of the Brethren will be measured as an indirect by-product of the survey of this thesis.

Second, one could expect divorce to have a similar effect upon the relationship between Brethren families and the church as it does on the relationship between Mennonites and the church. That is, for both Brethren adults and children, one could expect a lessened involvement or

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<sup>22</sup>Driedger, Yoder, and Sawatzky, 379.

<sup>23</sup>Driedger, Yoder, and Sawatzky, 381.

<sup>24</sup>Driedger, Yoder, and Sawatzky, 381.

<sup>25</sup>Faus.

withdrawal from participation in the church and a lessened adherence to Brethren beliefs.

In summary, the evidence on the effects of divorce on church attendance and involvement is inconclusive. In general church populations, divorce appears to have only a moderate effect, if any, on a continuing relationship with the church. However, some evidence does indicate that among small, sectarian groups like the Mennonites, divorce may cause a lessening in level of involvement by divorcing persons. This may be true for young people as well as adults. This conclusion supports the importance of measuring the ongoing level of involvement in the life of the church by divorcing families as an indicator of the church's ability to care for divorcing persons.

One additional element is important in considering specifically the relationship between children of divorce and the church. That is, the strong influence of parental religious affiliation on the religious affiliation of children. As shall be seen, a key to the church's ability to care for children of divorce may be the church's ability to maintain an ongoing relationship with parents who divorce.

#### Parental Influence on Children's Religion

A number of studies have demonstrated that the level of religious activity and commitment of children is directly related to the religiosity of their parents. Hoge and Petrillo found that parental religious affiliation and frequency of church attendance was the most dominant influence among all factors on adolescent's religious affiliations and frequency of church attendance.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>20</sup>Hoge and Petrillo, 376.



while the attendance level of both the mother and father were important, the mother was slightly more influential than the father.<sup>97</sup> Hoge and Petrillo also found that when parents belong to the same denomination as their children, the children attend church services and programs at a much higher rate.<sup>98</sup> In addition, they found the manner in which parents "live out" their religion was significant. Adolescents were more likely to be active in the church when they felt that religion actually influenced their parents' lives.<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, the young person's perception of his or her parents' religious leanings was a greater predictor of children's activity level in the church than was the parents' self-reports of their actual religious life.<sup>100</sup>

Martin Johnson, in a study of college students, found that those students who identified themselves as religious persons were more likely to come from homes they described as religious homes. At the same time, those students who identified themselves as non-religious came predominately from non-religious homes.<sup>101</sup> He also found that religious students identified parents and family as the greatest influence on their religious beliefs.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Hoge and Petrillo, 366.

<sup>98</sup>Hoge and Petrillo, 366.

<sup>99</sup>Hoge and Petrillo, 366.

<sup>100</sup>Hoge and Petrillo, 366-68.

<sup>101</sup>Martin A. Johnson, "Family Life and Religious Commitment," Review of Religious Research 14 (Spring 1973): 149.

<sup>102</sup>Martin Johnson, 150.

Darwin Thomas and others found that parents' overall attitude of support for their children was also an important factor in determining the religious attitudes and practices of children.<sup>103</sup> Consistent with other studies, they found that children rate their mother's as having a higher influence on their religious beliefs than any other adult.<sup>104</sup> This is important to the topic of children of divorce as mothers are the predominant custodial parent. As can be seen, a crucial element in any study of children's contact with the church is the level of contact of the parents with the church; especially so with the mother when she is the custodial parent. The subsequent survey of this thesis measures the influence of the parents' contact with the church on the availability of social supports for children.

#### The Church of the Brethren and Social Homogeneity

Before proceeding with a discussion of the results of the survey, a brief note should be made about the nature of the Church of the Brethren as a sample group. Throughout their history the Brethren have been a culturally and socially homogeneous group of people. Their strong anabaptist sectarianism was translated into close knit, family-like churches. Some of that social homogeneity has persisted in the present-day Church of the Brethren and can be seen in a demographic description of the denomination.

Carl Bowman notes that eighty percent of the Brethren live in the

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<sup>103</sup>Darwin L. Thomas et al., Family Socialization and the Adolescent (Toronto: Lexington, Heath, 1974), 106.

<sup>104</sup>Thomas, et al., 103

states of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Ohio, and Indiana.<sup>105</sup> In addition, fifty-five percent of the Brethren live in rural areas, while only fifteen percent live in urban areas.<sup>106</sup> Brethren congregations tend to be made up of many older persons. The median age of Brethren persons is fifty-four, with thirty percent of the church over the age of sixty-five.<sup>107</sup> The Brethren are a highly educated group. Some twenty percent of the Brethren have completed at least a four-year college degree, with only seventeen percent not finishing high school.<sup>108</sup> There is a high concentration of Brethren in professional careers, with some forty percent of the Brethren in management level or professional positions. In fact eleven percent of all Brethren adults are teachers.<sup>109</sup> As a result, the income level of the Brethren is above the national average. Forty-five percent of Brethren homes have an income of \$25,000 a year or more, with an additional forty-two percent earning between \$10,000 and \$25,000.<sup>110</sup>

In relationship to the church, some sixty-five percent of the Brethren attend "mainline" Brethren congregations which are similar in

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<sup>105</sup>Carl F. Bowman, "Brethren Today," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 202.

<sup>106</sup>Bowman, "Brethren Today," 204.

<sup>107</sup>Bowman, "Brethren Today," 204.

<sup>108</sup>Bowman, "Brethren Today," 206-7.

<sup>109</sup>Bowman, "Brethren Today," 205-7.

<sup>110</sup>Bowman, "Brethren Today," 207.

liturgical and worship styles to other mainline protestant groups.<sup>111</sup> The strength of identification with the larger Church of the Brethren is somewhat mild, with fewer than half of the Brethren supporting traditional tenets of Brethren belief and practice.<sup>112</sup> Importantly, in general agreement with current Brethren statements about divorce and remarriage, only eighteen percent of the Brethren believe that divorce is "always wrong," and only fourteen percent believe that remarriage after divorce is "always wrong."<sup>113</sup>

In short, for the purposes of this study, factors such as ethnicity, racial groupings, economic levels, education, and political diversity are naturally controlled and most likely have minimal impact on the outcomes of the research.

The survey which has been conducted among Brethren families, and is reported in the next chapter, examines the availability of social supports in Brethren congregations for children of divorce. The study indirectly explores the adequacy of the historic Brethren model of caregiving through life in the faith community for this particular group of persons. All of the information gathered is pioneering information as this author has concluded that this issue has never before been studied among the Brethren. The information supports the general thrust of Brethren desire to care for children of divorce, but

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<sup>111</sup>Carl F. Bowman, "Congregational Kaleidoscope," Messenger 135 (Oct. 1986): 15.

<sup>112</sup>Carl F. Bowman, "Church of the 'What?'" Messenger 135 (Dec. 1986): 15-6.

<sup>113</sup>Bowman, "Brethren Today," Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today, ed. D.F. Durnbaugh, 219.

questions the manner in which the Brethren have practiced their caring.

## CHAPTER 5

Social Supports for Children of Divorce in  
Church of the Brethren Congregations:  
A Survey

Our congregation tends to lose everyone from a divorce:  
parents and children.'

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of a survey conducted by this author with children in Church of the Brethren congregations. The survey measures the availability of social supports for children in their local Brethren congregation. As has been mentioned, the survey answers two research questions: Do children of divorce in Brethren congregations receive social supports from the congregation? Is the activity level in the congregation of the child, or the child's custodial parent, a factor in the availability of social supports for children in Brethren congregations? As mentioned, the availability of social supports was measured on four elements: (1) activity level, (2) interpersonal involvements, (3) emotional attachment, and (4) support ministries received. To report the results the chapter will be organized into four sections: a review of the research methodology; a report of the return frequency; a discussion of the research findings, divided according to the three hypotheses; and, finally, a concluding discussion of the implications of the survey.

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'Quoted from a pastor of a Church of the Brethren congregation in response to the survey of this thesis.

### Methodology

The first step in the research procedure was to gather a list of names and addresses of children in the Church of the Brethren. A stratified random sample of twenty percent of all Brethren congregations was chosen in a "blind draw" fashion. The congregational sample group was stratified according to the geographic distribution of the denomination. The Brethren are organized into twenty-four districts across the United States. Each district was represented among the congregations drawn in proportion to the percentage of congregations of the denomination in that district. The twenty percent figure was established to generate a large congregational sample group, ensuring validity of information and representation of the denomination. In total, one hundred ninety-six churches were drawn. Each congregation was contacted through a "three-wave" process and was asked to supply the names and addresses of all families in the congregation with children between eight and sixteen years of age. The churches were asked to indicate which of those families had experienced a divorce in recent years. In addition, the churches were asked about the size of the congregation and the number of divorces which had taken place in the congregation within the twelve months prior to the survey. Copies of materials sent to churches are included in Appendix A.

The churches responded with the names of more than 1,400 non-divorce children and over three hundred children of divorce. From these names, two sample groups were drawn randomly, one group made up of children of divorce, the other of non-divorce children. There were two hundred and fifty children in each group, totaling five hundred

children. The sample groups were large because a lower return rate was anticipated from the mail-in procedure. Contacting a larger number of children would again ensure a larger collection of data even if the return rate did prove to be low. The sample groups were once again stratified according to the geographic scheme used in the survey of congregations. In addition, an equal number of boys and girls were contacted. Mailings were also sent to children in a "three-wave" process. Children were asked to participate in a study of ministries for children in the Church of the Brethren. To avoid biasing the results, no mention was made of divorce in the introduction, only in subsequent questions. Families were contacted using the child's name on the mailings. Two questionnaires were sent, one for the child and one for a parent. The assumption was made that in divorced families the custodial parent was most likely to respond and in non-divorced families the parent who was most active in the church would respond. Materials sent to families are included in Appendix B.

Included in the material sent to congregations and families was a letter of introduction and endorsement of the project from denominational leader Donald Miller, General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren. As an incentive to participate, each family was given the opportunity to receive a summary of the results of the survey.

Steps were taken to ensure that the research procedures were sound and the questionnaires were appropriate for the study group. The questionnaires were evaluated by an expert in the teaching of reading to ensure their readability by young children. The questionnaires and letters of introduction were judged to be at the third grade level of



reading, normally the grade level of eight and nine year old children, the youngest children in the survey. The questionnaires were evaluated according to Edward Fry's "Graph for Estimating Readability."<sup>2</sup> In addition, prior to the survey, the questionnaires were reviewed by a panel of experts and were administered to a small sample group of children. Minor changes were suggested and implemented before distribution. The research procedures were designed and administered according to the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists," of the American Psychological Association.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the research was designed and the data analyzed through consultation with Shelly Getzlaf, a licensed Clinical Psychologist and an expert in research and statistical methodology.

Data from the returned questionnaires was entered into a computer for statistical analysis using Statview, a statistical software package.<sup>4</sup> The point of statistical significance was set at the .05 level for a two-tailed test, a commonly accepted level for the social sciences. The statistical tests used in the analysis of the data were Chi-Square, the Z-Ratio for Uncorrelated Proportions, the T-Test, and ANOVA. The Z-Ratio is similar to a Chi Square, however it is recommended for those measurements in which only one of two possible answers is the focus of interest. For example, on many measurements

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<sup>2</sup>Edward Fry, "A Readability Formula That Saves Time," Journal of Reading 11 (April 1968): 577.

<sup>3</sup>American Psychological Association, "Ethical Principles of Psychologists," American Psychologist 36 (June 1981): 637-38.

<sup>4</sup>Vicki F. Sharp, Joseph Koneka, and Michale Cuneo, Statview (Calabasas, Ca.: BrainPower, 1985).

children were given yes and no choices. The "yes" answers are actually the primary concern. The Z-Ratio compares the proportion or percentage of "yes" responses given to a particular question by the children in each sample group.<sup>5</sup> When statistical results are cited the tests used are noted. Finally, references are made throughout this discussion to specific questions on the questionnaires. Questions on the Children's Questionnaires are abbreviated simply as "CQ," and on the Parent's Questionnaires as "PQ." Abbreviations are followed by the number of the specific question. The reader is referred to Appendix B when specific questions are cited to examine copies of the questionnaires.

### Return Frequencies

#### Church Returns

Of the initial one hundred ninety-six congregations contacted, one hundred forty-five responded in some fashion, representing slightly over seventy-five percent of the original group. This remarkably high rate of return suggests that the information supplied by these congregations was valid and representative of the Church of the Brethren.

The membership of the responding congregations was approximately 22,000 members, slightly more than thirteen percent of the membership of the Church of the Brethren.<sup>6</sup> Congregations ranged in size from fifteen members to over eight hundred members. The average congregation was comprised of 148 members--124 adults and forty-four

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<sup>5</sup>J.P. Guilford and Benjamin Fruchter, Fundamental Statistics in Psychology and Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 158-59.

<sup>6</sup>Church of the Brethren, 1988 Yearbook, 188.

children.

The responding churches reported an average of nine divorced adults and four children of divorce in each congregation. Approximately eighty-four percent of the responding churches had at least one divorced adult or one child of divorce. In the twelve months preceeding this survey there had been an average of 4.3 divorces per one thousand persons. This compares to an average of 4.8 divorces per one thousand persons across the United States in 1987.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, approximately fifteen percent of the responding churches chose not to send any information. The reasons given for this choice, when they were given, varied from church to church. The predominant reason was that statistics on divorce, or names and addresses of divorced persons in their congregation, were considered too sensitive to reveal. However, some churches also reported that their congregation was so small, and perhaps had no children in the fellowship, that they could not see any value in responding. The implications of this factor are unclear to this author. One speculation is that the atmosphere surrounding divorce is tense and halting in some congregations, making even a discussion of the issue difficult. Clearly, some of the churches believe the issue is sensitive, reporting in some cases that the leaders or members felt only harm would be generated by a discussion of divorce.

#### Children's Returns

From the original five hundred families contacted, the total return was 294 families or approximately sixty percent. Of the non-divorce

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<sup>7</sup>USBC, Statistical Abstract: 1989, Table 134, 88.

children and parents, 170, or sixty-eight percent, returned questionnaires. This figure compared to a fifty percent return, or 124 returns, from children and parents of divorce. The return rate is lower than desired among the children of divorce. Perhaps their lower return rate is reflective of a more tenuous relationship to the church. Also, a number of children of divorce chose to not complete their questionnaires, most notably they did not answer questions about their relationship to the church following the divorce. Because of this, only one hundred completed questionnaires made up the final sample group of children of divorce used in the statistical analysis. This sample group was matched with an equal number, one hundred, of returns from non-divorce children. Thus, the total number in the study was two hundred. Admittedly, this omits some data, but that was only among the non-divorce children. The lower sample group size, when compared to the original mailing group is of concern. However, this is offset when it is realized that the size of the total sample group, two hundred, is still relatively large. In this author's opinion, the sample groups generated are large enough to validate the results of the survey.

The geographic stratifications of the original mailing group were well represented among the returns, signifying valid representation of the Church of the Brethren. No significant differences were found in the number of returns from boys and girls, suggesting they came equally from both. However, children of divorce were younger ( $M = 11.3$  years) than children from intact homes ( $M = 11.9$  years),  $t(198) = 1.67$ ,  $p < .025$ .

## Findings

### Hypothesis One

This hypothesis states:

In the two years following parental divorce, children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren receive more social supports from Brethren congregations when compared to children from non-divorce homes.

The rationale for stating Hypothesis One in this fashion is that because of the increased needs of children of divorce for support, and because of the stated intention of the Brethren to be caring for children of divorce, children of divorce would receive more social supports than non-divorce children. The assumption was made that children of divorce would receive as least as much support as children generally receive from the church and they would also receive additional support in the form of divorce related ministries. However, as shall be seen, this assumption was not supported.

Unfortunately, only ten questionnaires were returned from children whose parents had divorced in the two years prior to this survey. Such a small number makes it virtually impossible to develop reliable conclusions about children in the period immediately following divorce. Sadly, it is necessary to abandon this element of the three hypotheses. Instead, statistical analysis has examined the relationship between children of divorce and the church without regard for the amount of time since the divorce. Fortunately, a number of significant and useful findings were generated which expands the body of knowledge about children of divorce and their relationship with the church.

Data from the few children who were within the two year period following parental divorce suggests that they may have an especially

distant relationship with the church. Of the ten children in this group, seven were inactive and only three were mildly active, according to the measurements of activity level used in the analysis of data for Hypothesis Two. In addition, only two children were found to have an active parent, according to the criteria for parental activity used in Hypothesis Three. These findings heighten the disappointment over receiving such a small number of returns from children in this situation. Certainly this is an area of much needed further study.

In comparisons of children of divorce and children from intact homes on the four categories of social support, several statistically significant results were found. However, as a whole they were not supportive of Hypothesis One. In fact, they support the conclusion that children from intact homes are actually the ones who receive greater amounts of support, not children of divorce.

On measurements of activity level, children from intact homes were found to be more active in the life of the congregation than were children of divorce. Children from non-divorced homes were found to have attended their church longer ( $\bar{M} = 9.1$  years), than had children of divorce ( $\bar{M} = 7.4$  years),  $t(194) = 2.879$ ,  $p < .005$ . When asked to indicate the number of things done in their church in the six months prior to the survey (CQ 5), children from intact homes were found to have participated in more activities ( $\bar{M} = 4.8$  activities) than had children of divorce ( $\bar{M} = 4.2$  activities),  $t(198) = 2.402$ ,  $p < .01$ .

As can be seen in Table 1, children from intact homes were found to be more active on several specific measurements of activity level.

Table 1  
Children of Divorce and Children From Intact Homes  
Proportional Scores of Activity Level

Activity	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes		
Attend Worship	88%	96%	2.085	.04
Sing in Choirs	27%	43%	2.374	.02
Whole Church Events	57%	76%	2.846	.01
Attend Sunday School	81%	93%	1.578	.05

Table 2 shows that on measurements of interpersonal involvements, children from intact homes were more involved with people in their local congregation than were children of divorce.

Table 2  
Children of Divorce and Children From Intact Homes  
Proportional Scores of Interpersonal Involvement

Involvement	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes		
People at the church:				
Visit your home (CQ 11)	65%	86%	3.43	.0006
Visit their home (CQ 12)	67%	87%	3.33	.002
Eat at their home (CQ 13)	47%	70%	3.26	.001
Eat at your home (CQ 14)	38%	72%	4.72	.0001

Few differences between the two groups were found on measurements of kinship networks in the church. However, Table 3 shows that children from intact homes were more likely to have their father's relatives in

the church. Statistically significant findings regarding the paternal kinship network were discovered at several points in the analysis. As shall be discussed, the presence of the father's kinship network in a congregation often appears to effect the congregation's ability to maintain a relationship with a divorcing family. Here, the data indicates that non-divorce children are more likely to have father's relatives in the congregation. As shall be seen in subsequent discussions, children of divorce may be more likely to leave the church when their father's relatives are in the congregation, elevating the probability that non-divorce children will have higher levels of father's relatives in the church.

Table 3

Children of Divorce and Children from Intact Homes  
Proportional Scores of Father's Family  
in the Congregation

Relatives (CQ 15)	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes		
Father's Parents	18%	28%	9.08	.0001
Father's Siblings	16%	30%	9.08	.0001
Father's Cousins	15%	30%	9.08	.0001

When children of divorce were compared to children from intact homes, no statistically significant differences were found on measurements of emotional attachment.

Two significant differences were found between the groups on measurements of specific support ministries received. Table 4 shows



that children of divorce or their parent were more likely to have received counseling, while children from intact homes or their parent were more likely to have received visits in their homes by someone in the church, which may represent a more community-inclusive status for these families.

Table 4  
Children of Divorce and Children From Intact Homes  
Proportional Scores of Support Ministries Received

Support	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Score	p
	Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes		
Counseling (PQ13c)	29%	13%	2.78	.003
Home Visits (PQ 13j)	36%	62%	3.68	.0001

Null hypothesis. Hypothesis One, stated as a null hypothesis would be:

Children of divorce in Church of the Brethren congregations do not receive higher levels of social supports from Brethren congregations than do children from non-divorce homes.

Generally, it would be impossible to reject the null hypothesis. That is, the null hypothesis appears to be more accurate than the original hypothesis. On three of the four measurements of social supports--activity level, interpersonal involvement, and support ministries received--children from intact homes receive greater amounts of support from their congregation. On only one measurement do children of divorce receive more support, children or their parent receive counseling more often. On all other measurements, children

from intact homes were found to receive more support. Apparently, the needs of children of divorce for particular kinds of support, and possibly greater levels of support, and the Brethren desire to care for children of divorce do not produce higher levels of support for these children.

Other findings. These findings raise an interesting question, though children from intact homes appear to receive more support than children of divorce, does this mean that children of divorce actually receive little support? Or, is it possible that both groups of children receive social supports from their congregations? An overview of the data in the four categories of social support suggests that all children in the Church of the Brethren may receive only minimal supports, even though children from intact homes do receive higher levels of support.

In general, most of the children in this study appeared to participate in a wide variety of congregational events. On CQ 5, children in both groups reported that in the six months prior to this survey they had participated in more than four different events in their church; the average participation for non-divorce children was 4.8 events ( $SD = 1.7$ ), for children of divorce it was 4.2 events ( $SD = 1.8$ ). Though children from intact homes were statistically more active, as cited earlier, children of divorce could also be considered somewhat active in the church. On CQ 6, a Likert-scale question asking how often children participate in their church, with one indicating "several times a week" and five indicating "almost never," children of divorce scored  $M = 3.06$  ( $SD = 1.3$ ), while non-divorce children

scored  $M = 2.80$  ( $SD = 1.20$ ). Both groups of children scored at a mid range, indicating each were just moderately active in frequency of attendance, with non-divorce children being only slightly more active. Differences between the groups did not reach the acceptable level for statistical significance,  $t = 1.46$ ,  $.05 < p < .10$ . In short, both groups of children receive some supports from participation in a variety of events, though non-divorce children participate in more, but most Brethren children participate at only a moderate level of frequency.

As Table 5 demonstrates, both groups of children were quite positive when asked if they liked going to their church (CQ 9) and if they felt good with the people in their church (CQ 10). These were Likert-scale questions, with a score of one representing the most positive feelings toward the church and a score of five representing the least positive feelings. Differences between groups did not reach the point of statistical significance, perhaps because both groups feel good overall about their churches.

Table 5  
Children of Divorce and Children From Intact Homes  
Mean Scores of Emotional Attachment

	CQ 9	SD	CQ 10	SD
Children of Divorce	2.18	1.5	1.90	.986
Children of Intact Homes	2.15	1.3	1.89	.856

However, neither group reported that they talk to anyone in their church about things that are important in their lives (CQ 7). Again this measurement was a Likert-scale with a score of one indicating the child does confide in persons in the church and a five indicating they do not talk with anyone in the church about "things that are important." The Mean score for children of divorce was 3.65 ( $SD = 1.26$ ), and for non-divorce children the Mean was 3.42 ( $SD = .125$ ). Differences among the groups did not reach the level of statistical significance.

On yet another measurement of support, neither sample group appeared to receive generous amounts of specific support ministries. In the year prior to this survey, children in both groups and their responding parent had received fewer than two of the common supports normally given by the church (PQ 13). Again, the differences in the scores of the two groups failed to reach the level of statistical significance. The Mean for children of divorce was 1.5 supports ( $SD = .15$ ), and for children from intact homes the Mean score was 1.7 supports ( $SD = 1.6$ ).

In short, a fair conclusion is that both groups of children tend to like their congregations and the people in them, and participate in a variety of activities, though only at moderate levels of frequency. Neither group appeared to see the congregation as a source of support to deal with daily problems, nor did their families appear to receive many supportive ministries. Children from intact homes may receive more social supports than do children of divorce, as found on several of the measurements, however, neither group of children appeared

to receive great amounts of support.

The question might also be asked, do children of divorce receive any specifically divorce related supports from Brethren congregations? A number of questions were completed only by children of divorce. An overview of the responses suggests mixed results in the levels of support these children find.

Sadly, many children of divorce reported that they do not feel their church helped them after their parents' divorce. On CQ 17, a Likert-scale on which a score of one indicated that the church had been a great help following divorce and an opposite score of five indicating that the church was no help whatsoever, the Mean score was 3.4 ( $SD = 1.1$ ). More importantly the most common, or Mode, answer to this question was five, the church was no help at all following divorce.

In a similar fashion, many children reported on CQ 18, that they had seldom talked to anyone from any source about their parents' divorce. This question was another Likert-scale with a score of one indicating that children talk a great deal to people about the divorce, and a score of five indicating they never talk to anyone about divorce. The Mean score on this measurement was 3.57 ( $SD = 1.35$ ). More importantly, the Median answer was four and the Mode answer was five, indicating most of these children had not talked to anyone whatsoever about their parents' divorce.

On CQ 19, asking if children ever talk to anyone at their church about the divorce, the majority, sixty-two percent, reported that they had never talked to anyone in their church about the divorce.

On CQ 20, only fourteen percent of the children reported they had talked to their minister about the divorce, only fifteen percent had talked to their Sunday School teacher, only eight percent had talked to a youth advisor, and only seven percent had talked to a counselor in the church about divorce.

In addition, few directly divorce-related ministries were found in the church. The answers to PQ 22 are discouraging. Only eight percent of the families received divorce mediation counseling, only four percent found divorce recovery groups for adults, only two percent of the children received divorce counseling, none of the children had participated in divorce recovery groups, and none were given a referral by the church to a counselor in the community for divorce counseling. The most discouraging aspect of these findings is that Brethren statements, as cited in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, specifically call for such support ministries.

On a further discouraging note, though certainly important, responding parents reported that in most cases their ex-spouse (usually the children's father) had dramatically decreased his participation in the church after the divorce. On PQ 27, a Likert-scale measuring the church participation of the ex-spouse, the Mean score was 3.72 ( $SD = 1.6$ ), with a score of one indicating the ex-spouse attends much more than before the divorce, three indicating he or she attends about the same, and five indicating he or she attends much less. The Median and Mode answers to this question were both five, indicating that most commonly, the ex-spouses (the child's father) greatly lessen their participation in the church following divorce. Whether children also

participate less in the church during normal visitation periods with this parent is unclear, but this may be one factor in a lessened activity level among children of divorce.

Once again it appears true that children of divorce remain somewhat active in the church and seem to like their congregations, however, they appear to receive few formal support ministries aimed at helping them cope with the divorce. The support they do receive must be found through friendships, conversations, normal church activities, and through an emotional bonding between child and congregation that appears to be appealing and supportive for the child.

#### Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis Two is stated as:

The difference between the levels of social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren and the levels of social supports for non-divorce Brethren children are greater when the children are actively involved in the church. That is, there is an interaction between the effect of divorce and the effect of activity level.

In this hypothesis, divorce and activity level are seen as variables which have an interactive effect with one another. The belief is that each factor is a powerful influence on the level of social supports available to children. And, when the two factors are present together, their effects are increased. Hypothesis One assumed that there would be a difference between the levels of support received by children of divorce and non-divorce children. Hypothesis Two proposes that those differences are even greater when the factor of activity level is included in the analysis.

The first step in testing this hypothesis was to categorize children as either active or inactive. Children's Questions 5 and 6

were used for this purpose. Children at the Mean or greater (more active) on each of the two questions were included in the active group, the others were considered inactive. The two questions, when converted to standard scores, correlate highly with one another, demonstrating the appropriateness of using them in complementary fashion for determining activity level of children,  $r(200) = .423$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Initially, one important difference was found between these two groups of children which may be crucial to understanding the experience of children of divorce in the church. Table 6, a Chi-Square of observed frequencies of activity level, shows that children from intact homes are more active than children from divorced homes,  $\chi^2(1, N = 190) = 3.862$ ,  $p < .05$ . This finding alone casts doubt on the underlying assumption that the church is a helpful source of social support for children of divorce. If children of divorce tend to be inactive, it may be difficult for the church to be supportive of them. Nevertheless, these figures emphasize the importance of considering the effects of activity level on social supports.

Table 6

Observed Frequencies of  
Activity Levels

	Children of Divorce	Non-Divorce Children	Totals
Active	55	62	117
Inactive	45	28	73
Totals	100	90	190



These observed frequencies were compared using the Z-Ratio for Uncorrelated Proportions for the active children and their statistical significance was verified,  $Z = 2.0$ ,  $p < .05$ .

A Two-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the data for the presence of an interaction effect between divorce and activity level on the amounts of social supports received by children. Unfortunately, however, no statistically significant ANOVA results were found for interaction. This alone makes it nearly impossible to suggest that the data supports Hypothesis Two. Certainly this is disappointing. However, other findings may yet add to this discussion. In fact, through the findings of other statistical procedures it may yet be possible to support the assumptions of this hypothesis.

First, it was found, as expected that activity level alone is a significant factor in the relationship between all children and the church, at least justifying the underlying concern of Hypothesis Two. In fact, the data from the survey suggests that if divorce is eliminated as a variable in the statistical analysis, and children are compared only on the basis of activity level, a number of strong indicators are discovered. In short, many more supports are available for active children than for inactive children. Activity level, when considered alone, is a powerful influence.

Table 7 demonstrates in a brief fashion the higher availability of social supports among children who are active in their congregations. A lower mean score on each of these T-Tests indicates a closer relationship with the church and higher levels of support based simply on activity. Because children are categorized in this

hypothesis on the basis of activity level, it is pointless to compare sample groups on measurements of activity. Comparisons are made throughout the discussion of this hypothesis on only three categories of support--interpersonal involvements, emotional attachment, and supports received.

Table 7  
Social Supports Received By Active and Inactive Children

Measurements	Mean Score for Active Children	Mean Score for Inactive Children	t	p
<u>Interpersonal Involvements</u>				
Summary of CQ 11, 12, 13, 14	4.99	5.80	3.78	.0005
<u>Emotional Attachment</u>				
Like to go to church (CQ 9)	2.00	2.39	1.98	.025
Feel good about people in church (CQ 10)	1.79	2.74	3.78	.0005
<u>Supports Received</u>				
Talk to people in the church (CQ 7)	3.29	3.86	3.21	.005
More supports overall (PQ 13-- A higher Mean signifies more support)	1.80	1.41	1.72	.05

As can be seen, a main effect for activity level is demonstrated, with those children who are more active finding more support. In addition, Hypothesis One showed a main effect for divorce, though in

the opposite direction than anticipated. That is, children of divorce were found to receive fewer supports. While main effects are found for both factors the key question is, can an interaction effect be found between activity level and divorce? Other comparisons between groups of children need to be discussed for an answer.

One possible conclusion of Hypothesis Two is that those children who are active in the church and also come from a divorced home would receive greater amounts of support than those children who are active, yet come from a non-divorce home. This would be based on the assumptions of Hypothesis One that children of divorce receive higher levels of support. Perhaps with data from inactive children of divorce eliminated, results can be found which demonstrate the interaction of activity level and divorce. However, when active children of divorce are compared to active non-divorce children, very inconclusive results are found, casting doubt on the possibility of an interactive effect.

In comparisons between active children of divorce and active non-divorce children, it was found that active non-divorce children are somewhat more interpersonally involved, while active children of divorce received slightly more social supports. On a summary measure of interpersonal involvements (sum of CQ 11-14), active non-divorce children were found to be more involved ( $\bar{M} = 4.71$ ), than active children of divorce ( $\bar{M} = 5.29$ , with a lower sum score indicating more involvement),  $t(115) = 2.33$ ,  $p < .025$ . No significant differences were found among the groups in level of emotional attachment to the church. On two measures of specific supports, active children of divorce or their responding parent received more supports. Table 8 lists the

Z-Ratios for these two measures.

Table 8  
Active Children of Divorce and Active Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Support Ministries Received

Support	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Active Children of Divorce	Active Children of Intact Homes		
Counseling (PQ 13c)	20%	9%	2.72	.007
Transportation (PQ 13i)	16%	7%	2.40	.02

Similar results in each of the categories of social support are found when active children of divorce are compared to all children from intact homes, not only active non-divorce children as was done above. Non-divorce children are more interpersonally involved on summary measures (CQ 11-14,  $\bar{M} = 4.84$ ), than are active divorce children ( $\bar{M} = 5.29$ , with a lower score indicating greater involvement),  $t(153) = 1.91$ ,  $p < .05$ . Again, no differences were found among the two groups on emotional attachment to the church. On measures of support ministries received, as Table 9 indicates, active children of divorce or their responding parent, were more likely to receive counseling or transportation. However, non-divorce children were found to receive more home visits. Apparently, non-divorce children, even inactive ones, are more likely to receive visits in the home than are children of divorce, possibly indicating a position of lesser inclusion in the

community for children of divorce.

Table 9  
Active Children of Divorce and All Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Support Ministeries Received

Support	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Active Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes		
Counseling PQ 13c	37%	13%	3.92	.0001
Transportation PQ 13i	30%	11%	3.33	.0001
Home Visits PQ 13j	47%	62%	2.13	.02

Once again these findings suggest that children of divorce do not receive supports at expected levels and the anticipated interaction of variables is not demonstrated. On the other hand, the data from inactive children needs to be reviewed in order to reach a final conclusion. If it were true that activity level and divorce produce strong differences in the amounts of support children receive, one might expect that children of divorce who are inactive would receive greater supports than non-divorce children who are inactive. In fact, it was found that inactive children of divorce receive fewer supports than inactive children from intact homes. This suggests an interaction effect, however, in the opposite "direction" than had been anticipated.

Comparisons of inactive children of divorce and all non-divorce children show dramatic results, with children of divorce much less

supported by the church.

On measurements of interpersonal involvement many differences were found between inactive children of divorce and non-divorce children. Table 10 demonstrates that on several measurements of proportional differences, children from non-divorce homes were much more involved in personal relationships with people in the congregation.

Table 10

Inactive Children of Divorce and Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Interpersonal Involvements

<u>Observed Proportions</u>				
Involvement	Inactive Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes	Z-Score	p
People at the Church:				
Come to your home CQ 11	51%	86%	4.49	.0001
Go to their home CQ 12	49%	87%	4.87	.0001
Eat at your home CQ 13	33%	70%	4.30	.0001
Eat at their home CQ 14	22%	72%	5.61	.0001

On one other measurement of interpersonal involvement (CQ 15), children from non-divorce homes were found to have more relatives in the church ( $\bar{M}$  = 1.86 relatives) than did inactive children of divorce ( $\bar{M}$  = 1.36),  $t(143) = 1.77$ ,  $p < .05$ . Interestingly, inactive children of divorce were more likely to have their father's relatives in the church ( $\bar{M}$  = 7.06, a summary score with a lower Mean representing greater numbers of father's relatives), than were children from non-divorce

homes ( $M = 7.67$ ),  $t(143) = 3.07$ ,  $p < .005$ . This lends support to the discovery made earlier that the presence of the father's kinship network in a congregation is a powerful factor in determining the post-divorce family's relationship to the church. Custodial mothers may find it difficult to remain in a congregation with relatives of her ex-spouse and thus become less active. As a result, many children with paternal relatives in the congregation may become less active as well.

On measurements of emotional attachment, no significant differences were found, supporting the belief that children's activity level may not signify a strong emotional tie to the church, nor, that divorce may nullify emotional attachments.

When comparisons were made in the amount of specific supports received, children from non-divorce homes were again found to receive more supports than inactive children of divorce. On CQ 7, non-divorce children reported they were more likely to talk to people in the church about things that were important to them ( $M = 3.42$ , a Likert-scale with a score of one indicating that the child talks often to people in the church, and a score of five indicating they seldom talk to church people), while inactive children of divorce appear to talk to few people in the church ( $M = 4.00$ ),  $t(143) = 2.64$ ,  $p < .005$ . On yet another measurement, PQ 13, a slight tendency was found in the direction of non-divorce children and their family members receiving more supports overall from the church ( $M = 1.69$  supports), than inactive children of divorce ( $M = 1.27$  supports). However, the findings did not reach the acceptable level of statistical significance,  $t(141) = 1.53$ ,  $.05 < p < .10$ .

One further curcial comparison of children can be made in an

attempt to uncover an interaction effect between divorce and activity level. That is, a comparison of inactive children of divorce and inactive non-divorce children. As mentioned above, if an interactive effect does exist then inactive children of divorce should receive significantly different amounts of support when compared to inactive non-divorce children. In fact, that did prove to be the case. However, in contrast to the basic thrust of Hypothesis One which anticipated higher levels of support for children of divorce, the data demonstrates that inactive children of divorce receive fewer social supports than inactive non-divorce children.

Table 11 shows that inactive non-divorce children were found to be much more interpersonally involved in the church than were inactive children of divorce.

Table 11

Inactive Children of Divorce and Inactive Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Interpersonal Involvements

<u>Observed Proportions</u>				
Involvement	Inactive Children of Divorce	Inactive Children of Intact Homes	Z-Ratio	p
People at the Church:				
Come to your home CQ 11	51%	82%	2.82	.004
Go to their home CQ 12	49%	79%	2.73	.006
Eat at your home CQ 13	33%	63%	2.50	.01
Eat at their home CQ 14	22%	69%	4.27	.0001



Once again it was found that inactive children of divorce had higher numbers of relatives in the church ( $M = 7.0$  relatives, with a lower Mean indicating more relatives), than did inactive non-divorce children ( $M = 7.46$ ),  $t(1.82) = p < .05$ . When this statistic was re-evaluated through the use of ANOVA, statistical significance was not found, though a trend was indicated in support of the T-Test,  $F = 3.32$ ,  $.05 < p < .10$ .

On one measurement of social supports received, as Table 12 demonstrates, inactive non-divorce children were found to receive more home visits than did inactive children of divorce.

Table 12

Inactive Children of Divorce and Inactive Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Support Ministries Received

Support	<u>Observed Proportion</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Inactive Children of Divorce	Inactive Children of Intact Homes		
Home Visits	22%	58%	3.27	.001

These findings would suggest that divorce and activity level may combine to produce data that can only be explained by an interaction of both factors. Apparently, Brethren congregations provide more supports for children who are simply inactive, than they do for those children who are inactive and come from a divorced home. However, since this evidence comes from "nominal" data, and it is the only real support found for the thrust of Hypothesis Two, there is

little possibility that this hypothesis can be accepted.

Null hypothesis. The null hypothesis for Hypothesis Two is:

The difference between the levels of social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren and the levels of social supports for non-divorce Brethren children are not greater when the children are actively involved in the church. That is, there is not an interaction between the effect of divorce and the effect of activity level.

With the absence of statistically significant results from the ANOVA, it is extremely difficult to reject the null hypothesis in support of the main hypothesis. Though "main effects" are demonstrated for both activity level and divorce, with a variety of data forms, nominal and interval, the "interaction effect" of the two remains uncertain. If there was an interaction effect of these two factors one would expect to find greater supports for active children of divorce when compared to non-divorce children. In fact, the results are mixed on comparisons made between active children of divorce and non-divorce children and no conclusions can be drawn with certainty. This would lead to the conclusion that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This data is also unable to prove the possibility that divorce, and not the child's activity level, is the main factor influencing social supports for children of divorce, since the effects of activity level when combined with divorce remain undemonstrated.

In contrast, however, data generated from comparisons of groups of inactive children appears to support a rejection of the null hypothesis. That is, some interactive effect was found. Among inactive children, those from divorced homes did appear to receive fewer supports than children from non-divorced homes. The interactive effect of divorce and activity appears to be that divorce diminishes

the amount of support children of divorce receive, if they are also inactive in the church. While divorce and activity together do not produce statistically significant differences when children are active, they do produce significant differences when children are inactive. However, as mentioned above, this data provides only a weak support.

Admittedly, the choice to not reject the null hypothesis in this case creates the possibility of committing a "Type II" error. That is, while the null hypothesis is not rejected, the decision is made with the realization that there may indeed be an interaction effect between divorce and activity level which plays an important role in determining the levels of social supports available in Church of the Brethren congregations. This author chooses to not reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that the data is insufficient to support Hypothesis Two. The decision is based primarily on the absence of data from the ANOVA and the acknowledgement that the only supporting evidence for Hypothesis Two is nominal data, usually the least reliable form of data, and is only minimal in strength. However, in failing to reject the null hypothesis the author also still maintains the possibility of an interaction effect, suggesting that further research is needed to discover the relationship of these two factors.

Other findings. On a further note, these findings begin to focus attention on one specific group of children who appear to be especially "cut off" from the support of the church, inactive children of divorce. While this is not at all surprising, it must be remembered, that the children in this study were all included in the survey because they are considered to be part of a Brethren congregation. Yet on every

comparison made of various groups of children, inactive children of divorce were found to receive lower levels of social supports from the church than any other group. This is understandable since a crucial component of the Brethren model of caregiving is inclusion in the community of faith. Some of these findings question the adequacy of this model for children of divorce.

A demonstration of the effects of activity level on the amount of social supports received by children of divorce is to compare social supports received by children of divorce who are active with those children of divorce who are inactive. The number of statistically significant differences on measurements of social supports are dramatic when active children of divorce are compared to inactive children of divorce.

Table 13

Active Children of Divorce and Inactive Children of Divorce  
Proportional Scores of Interpersonal Involvement

Involvement	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Active Children of Divorce	Inactive Children of Divorce		
People from the Church:				
Come to your home (CQ 11)	76%	51%	3.67	.0002
Go to their home (CQ 12)	82%	49%	4.91	.0001
Eat at you home (CQ 13)	58%	33%	3.55	.0002
Eat at their home (CQ 14)	52%	22%	4.39	.0001

Table 13 shows that on measurements of interpersonal involvements, active children of divorce were much more involved in the congregation than were inactive children of divorce.

Inactive children of divorce were found to have greater numbers of their father's relatives in the church (CQ 15,  $\bar{M} = 7.67$ , with a lower score representing more relatives on a summary scale) than did active children ( $\bar{M} = 8.27$ ),  $t(98) = p < .0005$ . As is true for all children of divorce, Brethren children of divorce predominantly reside with their mothers. In fact, eighty-two percent of the divorced parents responding were mothers, seventy percent had custody of their children and an additional fourteen percent shared custody with their ex-spouse. This finding adds support to the belief that custodial mothers may lessen their contact with their local congregation when their ex-spouse has relatives in that congregation, causing diminished contact between children and the congregation as well. This phenomenon will be explored even further in Hypothesis Three, when activity level of the parent becomes the focus of discussion.

Active and inactive children of divorce were found to be similar on measurements of emotional attachment.

On measurements of specific support ministries received, active children of divorce were found to receive more support. They were more likely to talk to persons in the church about things that were important to them ( $\bar{M} = 3.36$ , CQ 7, with a score of one indicating they were very likely to talk to persons in the church and a score of five indicating little likelihood of talking to persons in the church), than were inactive children ( $\bar{M} = 4.00$ ),  $t(98) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .01$ .

In addition, as Table 14 indicates, active children of divorce or their responding parent received more overall support ministries. Interestingly, as indicated, inactive children were found to have more often talked to their ministers about the divorce.

Table 14

Active Children of Divorce and Inactive Children of Divorce  
Proportional Scores of Support Ministries Received

<u>Observed Proportions</u>				
Support	Active Children of Divorce	Inactive Children of Divorce	Z-Ratio	p
Counseling (PQ 13c)	38%	19%	2.92	.004
Transportation (PQ13i)	30%	9%	3.75	.0001
Home Visits (PQ 13j)	47%	22%	3.72	.0001
Talk to your minister (CQ 20a)	11%	22%	2.07	.04
Talk to a Counselor (CQ 20i)	16%	3%	3.13	.0001

However, on a suprising series of Likert-scale measurements, inactive children of divorce were found to be more positive about the church than were active children of divorce. Table 15 demonstrates that inactive children of divorce are more likely to have increased their activity level in the church following divorce and feel the church helped them more after divorce. In addition, inactive children of divorce talk to people about divorce (not limited to persons in the church) more than active children. On these scales, a lower score indicates a more positive attitude toward the church.

Table 15

Active Children of Divorce and Inactive Children of Divorce  
Mean Scores of Supports Received

Support	Active Children of Divorce	Inactive Children of Divorce	t	p
Activities at Church Since the Divorce (CQ 16)	2.02	1.41	2.99	.005
Feel the Church Helped (CQ 17)	3.24	1.22	8.61	.0005
Talk to <u>Anyone</u> About Divorce (CQ 18)	3.42	1.35	8.68	.0005

Evidentially, among those children of divorce who were determined to be inactive, many are actually more active in the church than they were prior to the divorce. For those children who are active in the congregation, less change is reported in their relationship to the church following the divorce. On CQ 16, only six percent of all children of divorce indicate they are less involved the church since the divorce. These findings suggest that divorce may not cause a diminished relationship between children of divorce and the church. Instead, families of divorce may naturally be less active, perhaps even prior to the divorce, and some of these families draw closer to the church following divorce. Still, these inactive children do not appear to be greatly supported by the church.

### Hypothesis Three

As was detailed in Chapter 4, parents are an influential factor in children's relationship with the church. This hypothesis structures the research to examine the effect of parental activity level in the

congregation on the level of social supports children of divorce receive in the Church of the Brethren. Once again, as in Hypothesis Two, this hypothesis suggests there is an interactive effect between parental activity level and divorce. Both divorce and parent activity level are seen as powerful factors when considered alone. However, in similar fashion to Hypothesis Two, this hypothesis proposes that when these two factors are considered together the size of the differences in social supports by these factors are increased.

Hypothesis Three states:

The difference between the levels of social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren and the levels of social supports for non-divorce Brethren children are greater when parents are actively involved in the church. That is, there is an interaction between the effect of divorce and the effect of parental activity level.

Two measurements of parental activity level, PQ 4 and PQ 5, were used to divide the sample groups into "Parent Active" and "Parent Inactive" categories. Children whose parents were at the Mean score or higher in activity level on both measurements were placed in the active group, the remainder were placed in the "Parent Inactive" group. The two measurements correlate highly, indicating the appropriateness of using them in complimentary fashion for determining the activity level of parents,  $r(195) = .547$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Statistical analysis did discover a correlation between children's activity level in their congregation and that of their parents, both for children of divorce and children from non-divorce homes. Statistically significant correlations were found when the number of activities in which children participated (CQ5) were compared to a similar measurement for parents (PQ 4): For children of divorce  $r(96) = .282$ ,  $p < .01$ ; for



children from intact homes  $r(96) = .473$ ,  $p < .001$ . As is apparent, the correlation was stronger for children from intact homes.

In addition, the frequency of participation in the congregation correlated strongly between children and parents for both children of divorce,  $r(95) = .444$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for children from intact homes,  $r(96) = .509$ ,  $p < .001$ . As can be seen both measurements were beyond the acceptable level for statistical significance.

Another important initial finding was discovered when the number of divorced parents who are inactive were compared to the number of parents who are inactive in non-divorce families. As can be seen in the following Chi-Square table, many more divorced parents are inactive than are non-divorce parents,  $\chi^2(1, N = 200) = 19.315$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Table 16

Children of Divorce and Children From Non-Divorce Homes  
Observed Frequencies of Parent Activity Level

	Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes	Totals:
Parent Active	38	69	107
Parent Inactive	62	31	93
Totals:	100	100	200

When these observed frequencies for the parent-active groups were compared using the Z-Ratio for Uncorrelated Proportions, the statistical significance of the finding was verified,  $Z = 4.397$ ,  $p < .0001$ .

Since the activity level of parents is the focus of attention in this hypothesis, in contrast to Hypothesis Two, the activity level of the child is once again used as an element of social support. Thus, social supports are again measured by four elements: activity level, interpersonal involvements, emotional attachment, and specific ministry supports received.

Once again, as was also the case in Hypothesis Two, the ANOVA failed to discover any statistically significant results. That is, the belief that an interaction effect exists between divorce and parent activity level was not demonstrated. However, other data, in addition to the ANOVA, can be examined for verification of any possible interaction effect of the two variables.

As a beginning point of the discussion, the ANOVA and other tests did verify the "main effect" of parent activity level on the levels of social supports received by children generally in the church. When divorce was eliminated as a factor and parent activity level alone was considered, all children whose parents were active receive more supports than those children whose parents were inactive.

On measurements of activity level, in the six months prior to this survey parent-active children had participated in many more events (CQ 5,  $M = 5.22$  events), than had parent-inactive children ( $M = 3.76$  events),  $t(198) = 6.25$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Parent-active children also participate more frequently (CQ 6, a Likert-scale in which a lower

score indicates more frequent participation,  $M = 2.63$ ), than parent-inactive children ( $M = 3.28$ ),  $t(198) = 3.76$ ,  $p < .0005$ .

On measurements of interpersonal involvement parent-active children were found to be more closely tied to the congregation. Table 17 shows the predominantly higher level of involvement of these children.

Table 17

All Parent-Active Children and All Parent-Inactive Children  
Observed Proportions of Interpersonal Involvements

Involvements	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Parent-Active Children	Parent-Inactive Children		
People in the church:				
Come to your home (CQ 11)	85%	64%	3.96	.0001
Go to their home (CQ 12)	87%	66%	5.83	.0001
Eat at their home (CQ 13)	66%	49%	2.58	.01
Eat at your home (CQ 14)	69%	40%	3.94	.0001

On measurements of emotional attachment no differences were found between the two groups.

On measurements of specific supports received parent-active children were found to more often talk to people in their church about things that were important to them ( $M = 3.38$ , CQ 7, a Likert-scale, on which a lower score indicates more frequent conversations with people in the church), than were parent-inactive children ( $M = 3.71$ ),  $t(198) = 1.84$ ,  $p < .05$ .

There was a tendency demonstrated for parent-active children or their responding parent to receive more supports (PQ 13,  $M = 1.81$  supports), than parent-inactive children ( $M = 1.44$ ),  $t(195) = 1.63$ ,  $.05 < p < .10$ . However, this did not reach the level of statistical significance.

In summary, it does appear that children whose parents are active in the church do generally receive more supports from the church than children whose parents are inactive. However, this conclusion is not supported unconditionally by the findings. While parental activity level appears crucial for determining children's activity level and level of interpersonal involvement, it is not seen to be as powerful in determining the child's emotional attachment to the church or the amount or kinds of support ministries the child receives. In contrast, more significant results were found when the child's activity level alone was considered in Hypothesis Two.

Thus, while a main effect for parent activity level is generally supported, the issue of an interaction effect between parent activity level and divorce remains to be explored further. As in the case of Hypothesis Two, other findings contribute to an understanding of how these two factors combine in their effect on social supports. A starting point for this discussion is to examine the amount of social supports received by those children of divorce whose parents are active. Built upon the model of caregiving through life in the community, and the desire to be caring of divorcing families, it might be expected that children of divorce whose parents are active in the church receive greater amounts of support than do non-divorce children.

That is, the interaction of divorce and high parent activity level would combine to make more supports available to parent-active children of divorce. However, the data does not support this conclusion. In fact, inconclusive results are found in comparisons of parent-active children of divorce and non-divorce children, though some data supports the hypothesis.

In the area of activity level for these two groups, children from intact homes were likely to have gone to their church longer ( $M = 9.05$  years), than had parent-active children of divorce ( $M = 6.63$  years),  $t(132) = 3.08$ ,  $p < .005$ . This difference may be accounted for by the fact that on average intact children were slightly older, however, they were older only by an average of six months. Why parent-active divorced families have shorter relationships to the church is unclear, but that appears to be indicated by this finding.

Table 18

Parent-Active Children of Divorce and All Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Activity Level

<u>Observed Proportions</u>				
Activity	Parent-Active Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes	Z-Ratio	p
Attend Worship (CQ 5a)	100%	96%	2.02	.04
Sing in Choirs (CQ 5b)	18%	43%	3.77	.0002

Table 18 shows that parent-active children of divorce were slightly

more likely to have attended worship in the six months prior to this survey, though both groups of children attended at very high rates. Children from intact homes were more likely to have participated in choirs, a common activity for children.

However, in direct support of the hypothesis, on a crucial summary measurement of CQ 5, on what are considered central church activities (worship, Sunday School, Junior High or Youth groups, and "other" activities), parent-active children of divorce participated in more events in the six months prior to this survey ( $M = 5.18$ , with a lower score indicating a higher level of participation), than all children from non-divorce homes ( $M = 6.02$ ),  $t(136) = 3.86$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). This finding was particularly strong, indicating that when divorced parents remain active, their children are also much more active, more active than are children normally in the church.

Table 19

Parent-Active Children of Divorce and All Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Interpersonal Involvement

<u>Observed Proportions</u>				
Involvement	Parent-Active Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes	Z-Ratio	p
People in the Church:				
Visit your home (CQ 12)	74%	87%	2.38	.02
Eat at their home (CQ 13)	53%	70%	2.47	.01
Eat at your home (CQ 14)	50%	72%	3.14	.002

However, in the area of interpersonal involvements, children from intact homes are much more involved in relationships in the congregation than are parent-active children of divorce. Table 19, summarizes several of the statistically significant findings.

In other measurements of interpersonal involvements, children from non-divorce homes were again found to have larger kinship networks in the church. Children from non-divorce homes had higher numbers of relatives overall in their congregations (CQ 15,  $\bar{M} = 1.86$  relatives) than did parent-active children of divorce ( $\bar{M} = 1.21$ ),  $t(136) = 2.10$ ,  $p < .025$ . Specifically, children from intact homes were found to have more relatives from their father's kinship network in the church (CQ 15e-h,  $\bar{M} = 7.06$ , with a lower summary score indicating more relatives, than parent-active children of divorce ( $\bar{M} = 7.53$ ),  $t = 2.11$ ,  $p < .025$ .

Again the presence of the father's kinship network surfaces as a significant finding. Earlier, in Hypothesis Two, this phenomenon was discovered in comparisons of active and inactive children of divorce. It was found that inactive children of divorce were more likely to have their father's relatives in the church. Here it is learned that parent-active children from intact homes are more likely to have their father's relatives in the church. Both findings are consistent and suggest that the presence of the father's relatives in a congregation is vital in determining the continued activity of custodial mothers and children in the congregation following divorce. When the father has relatives in the congregation, parents and children are more likely to be inactive. Common sense would suggest that custodial mothers may be less likely to participate in the same

congregations as the relatives of their ex-spouse. This is verified by the finding cited in Chapter 2 that divorced adults usually have much less contact with the kinship network of their ex-spouse following divorce.<sup>9</sup> These findings suggest that one possible focus of intervention by the church is conciliatory mediation between the extended family of the ex-spouse and the custodial parent, aimed at reconciling hurt feelings and resentments.

On measurements of emotional attachments, only one statistically significant measurement was found. Children from intact homes reported more frequently that they had good feelings when they were with the people at their church (CQ 10,  $\bar{M} = 1.89$ , with a lower score indicating closer emotional bonding with people in the congregation), than did parent-active children of divorce ( $\bar{M} = 2.29$ ),  $t = 2.23$ ,  $p < .025$ .

Table 20

Parent-Active Children of Divorce and All Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Ministries Received

<u>Observed Proportions</u>				
Ministry	Parent-Active Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes	Z-Ratio	p
Counseling (PQ 13c)	34%	13%	3.48	.0004
Transportation (PQ 13i)	29%	11%	3.09	.002
Home Visits (PQ 13j)	47%	62%	2.10	.04

<sup>9</sup>Spicer and Hampe, 118.



Children in these two groups were similar in the amounts of specific support ministries received. However, as was found in both Hypothesis One and Hypothesis Two, parent-active children of divorce or their parents are more likely to have received counseling and transportation help from someone in the church. On the other hand, as Table 20 demonstrates, children from non-divorced homes were once again found to be more likely to have persons in the church visit their home.

The overall results are inconclusive. Parent-active children of divorce are more active in central congregational activities, but are much less interpersonally involved, and on one measure are less emotionally attached to the church. On the other hand, these children or their parent receive more counseling and transportation, but fewer home visits. The evidence in support of an interaction effect between the two variables, divorce and parent activity level, is weak based on these comparisons. That is, high parent activity and divorce do not combine to create substantially different levels of support for one group of children or the other--divorce or non-divorce. But, is the same thing true for those children whose parents are inactive? In Hypothesis Two it was found that inactive children of divorce received fewer social supports, some of the only support found in favor of an interaction effect of the variables. Is it possible that the same is true for low parent activity? In fact, parent-inactive children do appear to receive fewer supports than other groups of children. A first demonstration of that is in a comparison of inactive children of divorce and all children from non-divorce homes.

In each of the four categories of support, children of divorce

whose parents were inactive received less support from the church than children from non-divorce homes. On measurements of activity level, non-divorce children were found to be much more active than parent-inactive children of divorce. Non-divorce children participated in more activities (CQ 5,  $\bar{M}$  = 4.84 activities), than parent-inactive children of divorce ( $\bar{M}$  = 3.81 activities),  $t(160) = 3.52$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Table 21 shows that non-divorce children participated in several activities of the church at higher rates.

Table 21  
Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce and All Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Activity Level

Activity	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes		
Attend Worship (CQ 5a)	81%	96%	3.12	.002
Events for Whole Church (CQ 5e)	42%	76%	4.36	.0001
Sunday School (CQ 5g)	73%	93%	3.51	.0004
Pot-Luck Dinners (CQ 5j)	47%	65%	2.25	.02

On a summary measure of focal events in a church--worship, Sunday Schools, "other" events, and youth groups--non-divorce children were found to have participated much more (CQ 5,  $\bar{M}$  = 5.42) than did parent-inactive children of divorce ( $\bar{M}$  = 5.91, with a lower score indicating a higher activity level),  $t(160) = 3.50$ ,  $p < .0005$ .

Non-divorce children also participated in events at their church more frequently (CQ 6, a Likert-scale in which a lower score indicates more frequent participation,  $\bar{M} = 2.8$ ), than did parent-inactive children of divorce ( $\bar{M} = 3.32$ ),  $t(160) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Table 22 indicates that on every measure of interpersonal involvements where statistical significance was found, children from intact homes were more involved.

Table 22

Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce and All Non-Divorce Children  
Observed Proportions of Interpersonal Involvements

	<u>Observed Proportions</u>			
Involvement	Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes	Z-Ratio	p
<hr/>				
People in the church:				
Come to your home (CQ 11)	60%	86%	3.42	.0006
Go to their home (CQ 12)	63%	87%	3.73	.0001
Eat at your home (CQ 13)	44%	70%	3.25	.001
Eat at their home (CQ 14)	31%	72%	5.00	.0001

Measurements of emotional attachment to the congregation yielded interesting results. On CQ 10, a Likert-scale asking how children felt when they were with the people in their church, parent-inactive children of divorce had a tendency to indicate they had more positive feelings toward the people in the church ( $\bar{M} = 1.68$  on the scale, with a

lower score indicating more positive feelings about people in the church), than did children from non-divorce homes ( $M = 1.89$ ),  $t(159) = 1.56$ ,  $.05 < p < .10$ . However, as can be seen, the measurement did not reach the level of statistical significance, though a trend might be inferred. Also, as is demonstrated by these figures, both groups of children had positive feelings about people in their church.

Two measurements of specific social supports reached the point of statistical significance. As Table 23 shows, parent-inactive children of divorce or their responding parent were more likely to have received counseling from someone in the church, but non-divorce children or their responding parent received more home visits.

Table 23

Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce and All Non-Divorce Children  
Proportional Scores of Supports Received

Supports	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce	Children of Intact Homes		
Counseling (PQ 13c)	16%	13%	2.06	.04
Home Visits (PQ 13j)	17%	59%	4.15	.0001

These results suggest that divorce and parent activity level do combine to increase the effects of both variables, in support of Hypothesis Three. However, once again, in a direction opposite to that which was predicted by this author, and that predicted by Church of the

Brethren statements of desire to care for children of divorce.

Children of divorce whose parents are inactive are much less active in the church themselves and are much less involved in the interpersonal network of the church. They, or their responding parent, also receive fewer visits in their home than do non-divorce children.

However, the support for an interactive effect of the two variables diminishes when parent-inactive children of divorce are compared to parent-inactive non-divorce children, a very crucial comparison for demonstrating interaction. Few statistically significant differences were found between these two groups. No differences were found in the area of the activity level of the child. On one measurement of interpersonal involvements, parent-inactive non-divorce children were found to be mildly more involved in the church. On a summary score of CQ 11 - CQ 14, inactive-parent non-divorce children ( $M = 5.36$ , with a lower score indicating greater involvement), were more involved in interpersonal relationships ( $M = 6.00$ ),  $t(1.83) = p < .05$ . These results were also examined through ANOVA, however, and statistical significance was not found, though a trend of support was suggested,  $f(DF, \text{Between groups} = 1, \text{Within groups} = 91) = 3.33, .05 < p < .10$ .

No differences were found between these two groups on measures of emotional attachments or specific support ministries received.

Overall, the support for an interactive effect of the two variables is weak in all of these comparisons. Main effects were found for the two variables. Parent activity level was seen to produce an effect on the amount of support children receive from the church, as

was true of divorce, but no clarity was found on the nature of the interaction of the two variables.

Null hypothesis. When Hypothesis Three is stated as a null hypothesis it reads:

The difference between the levels of social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren and the levels of social supports for non-divorce Brethren children are not greater when parents are actively involved in the church. That is, there is not an interaction between the effect of divorce and the effect of parental activity level.

The data clearly does not allow a rejection of the null hypothesis. Little evidence was found that there is an interaction effect when parent activity level and divorce are examined together. This is especially true in the absence of statistically significant results from the ANOVA. Other comparisons of children, using dichotomous data also provided little support. Only a few differences reaching the level of statistical significance were found when comparing parent-active children of divorce with non-divorce. Should there be an interaction effect it most likely would have been seen here. There was some mild support of Hypothesis Three when parent-inactive children of divorce were compared to all non-divorce children; parent-inactive children of divorce received fewer supports. However, in a crucial comparison between parent-inactive children of divorce and parent-inactive non-divorce children, where an interaction effect might have been most clearly seen, the evidence became quite weak. As a result, this author once again chooses to not reject the null hypothesis, thereby stating that the primary hypothesis is unsupported.

Other findings. In similar fashion to Hypothesis Two, the data

explored in Hypothesis Three again focuses attention on one group of children of divorce, those whose parents are inactive in the church. The findings suggest that these children receive very low levels of social support from Brethren congregations. This is demonstrated even further when the supports received by parent-active children of divorce are compared to parent-inactive children of divorce. Parent activity level appears to be important for these children.

On measurements of activity level, parent-active children of divorce reported that in the six months prior to this survey they had participated in more events in their congregation (CQ 5,  $\bar{M}$  = 4.9 events) than had parent-inactive children of divorce ( $\bar{M}$  = 3.8 events),  $t(98) = 3.12$ ,  $p < .005$ . As Table 24 indicates, parent-active children were much more active in a number of congregational events.

Table 24

Parent-Active and Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce  
Proportional Scores of Activities

Activity	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Parent-Active Children of Divorce	Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce		
Worship (CQ 5c)	100%	81%	4.60	.0001
Whole Church Events (CQ 5e)	82%	42%	5.73	.0001
Sunday School (CQ 5g)	95%	73%	4.27	.0001
Youth Groups (CQ 5i)	42%	23%	2.80	.005
Pot-Luck Dinners (CQ 5j)	68%	47%	3.10	.002

Also, parent-active children of divorce reported on a Likert-scale measurement (CQ 6) that they did things more frequently at church ( $M = 2.63$ , a lower score representing more frequent activity) than did parent-inactive children of divorce ( $M = 3.3$ ),  $t(98) = 2.60$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Few statistically significant differences were found between parent-active and parent-inactive children of divorce on measurements of interpersonal involvements. As can be seen in Table 25, parent-active children of divorce were found to be slightly more involved in relationships in the congregation.

Table 25

Parent-Active and Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce  
Proportional Scores of Interpersonal Involvements

Involvement	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Parent-Active Children of Divorce	Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce		
People in Church:				
Come to your home (CQ 11)	74%	60%	2.09	.04
Eat at Their Home (CQ 14)	50%	31%	2.74	.003

Another summary measurement found that parent-inactive children of divorce had more relatives in the church ( $M = 1.7$  relatives in the congregation) than did parent-active children ( $M = 1.2$  relatives),  $t(98) = 1.69$ ,  $p < .05$ . This appears to be consistent with the earlier finding that inactive children were more likely to have their father's



relatives in the church. However, this discovery also suggests that divorcing families find it more difficult to be in settings with all of their relatives, consanguines and affines, following divorce. This was supported by the discovery that parent-inactive children were more likely to have their maternal grandparents in the church (Observed Proportion is 42%), when compared to parent-active children (Observed Proportion is 18%),  $Z = 3.60$ ,  $p < .0004$ . Should these discoveries be true, they have great implications for the church and ministry with divorcing families. That is, a focus on mediation with the entire extended family network may be a crucial step in any ministry with divorcing families.

Interestingly, on one measurement of emotional attachment, it was found that parent-inactive children of divorce had more positive feelings about the people in their church (CQ 10,  $M = 1.68$ , with a score of one indicating more positive feelings about people in the church and a five indicating less positive feelings), than did parent-active children of divorce ( $M = 2.29$ ),  $t(98) = 3.15$ ,  $p < .005$ .

On measurements of specific supports received, parent-active children of divorce appeared to find many more forms of support from their congregation. Parent-active children of divorce reported that they or their responding parent had received more supports overall in the twelve months prior to this survey (PQ 13,  $M = 1.97$  supports) than did parent-inactive children ( $M = 1.36$  supports),  $t(97) = 1.91$ ,  $p < .05$ . Table 26 lists those specific supports.

Table 26

Parent-Active and Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce  
Proportional Scores of Supports Received

Support	<u>Observed Proportions</u>		Z-Ratio	p
	Parent-Active Children of Divorce	Parent-Inactive Children of Divorce		
"Other Supports" (PQ 13f)	18%	6%	2.56	.01
Child Care (PQ 13g)	18%	8%	2.13	.04
Transportation (PQ 13i)	29%	15%	2.45	.01
Home Visits (PQ 13j)	47%	28%	2.75	.006
Talk to Sunday School Teachers about Divorce (CQ 20b)	26%	12%	2.70	.007
Talk to Youth Minister about Divorce (CQ 20f)	18%	4%	3.14	.0001

On each of the four elements of social support statistically significant differences were found between parent-active and parent-inactive children of divorce. In fact, no single other factor found as many statistically significant measurements in comparisons made between various groups. Measurements were found in which parent-active children of divorce were more active, more interpersonally involved, and received more specific supports. However, parent-inactive children of divorce were found to have more positive feelings about their church on one measurement. While children of divorce whose parents are inactive appear to be much less active in the church themselves, their emotional bond to the church appears to be strong. Perhaps this is an instance in which social supports are supplied in ways that are

difficult to measure or explain, that is, emotional bonding. Parent-inactive children of divorce may find some comfort in their relationship with the church, though their relationship is somewhat distant.

### Discussion

At this point a summary of the findings of the research data might be useful. None of the three proposed hypotheses were supported by statistical analysis. Greater social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren were not found, nor were interaction effects between divorce and activity level--of the child or the parent. Though the absence of findings in support of the hypotheses is disappointing, some statistically significant results did appear. Fortunately, these findings do contribute to the body of knowledge about children of divorce and ministry with children of divorce.

Hypothesis One proposed that because of their increased needs for social supports, and because of the stated desire by the Church of the Brethren to care for children of divorce, there would be more supports available for children of divorce than for children from intact homes. In fact, the opposite was found to be true. Children of divorce do not appear to receive more supports than children normally receive from the church; they appear to receive fewer supports.

In the process of exploring the data for Hypothesis One, other useful results were uncovered and were discussed earlier in the chapter. A summary listing is:

1. In the first two years following divorce, the relationship

between divorcing families and Brethren congregations seems especially strained. Almost all of the children of divorce and divorced adults who returned questionnaires and who were within two years of the divorce were inactive in the church.

2. Most of the children of divorce did not feel that the church had been especially helpful to them following divorce.

3. Children of divorce participated in fewer activities and participated in the church less frequently than non-divorce children.

4. Children of divorce were less involved in the interpersonal networks of the church than non-divorce children.

5. Most of the children did not talk to any "church leaders" about divorce--pastors, youth ministers, Sunday School teachers, etc.

6. Almost no specifically divorce-related ministries were found throughout the entire Church of the Brethren. With the exception of counseling, which many children of divorce did find available, there were no divorce recovery ministries reported in Brethren congregations.

Hypothesis Two proposed that there is an interaction effect between divorce and activity level of the child which increases the differences in the amounts of social supports received by children of divorce and non-divorce children. The only mild support of this hypothesis was found when it was discovered that inactive children of divorce did receive fewer social supports than inactive non-divorce children. Unfortunately, the amount of data was small, making it impossible to verify the assumptions of the hypothesis. Nevertheless, other useful results were generated in exploring this hypothesis. In summary, the findings are:

1. Children of divorce were more likely to be inactive in the church than were non-divorce children.

2. In every category of social support, active children of divorce received higher levels of support than did inactive children of divorce.

3. Children from non-divorce homes or their responding parent, regardless of activity level, were more likely to receive visits in their home from persons in the church than were any group of children of divorce. This finding may signify that non-divorce children and parents enjoy a more inclusive status in the life of the congregation.

4. All children of divorce, regardless of activity level, reported at higher levels that they or their responding parent had received counseling from someone in their church. Suggestions in Brethren statements for this form of ministry with children of divorce did seem to be carried out by congregations. However, other forms of specific ministries mentioned in the statement--financial aid, day care, transportation--were not as likely to have been supplied.

5. Most children of divorce who were active in their congregation reported that their relationship to the church changed little following divorce, while inactive children of divorce tended to indicate that they may have grown a little closer to the church. Inactive children of divorce were more likely to report that the church had been helpful to them following divorce than were active children of divorce. This important finding may indicate that there are supports available from the church that are intangible and difficult to measure empirically. That is, in the midst of a difficult and confused life experience, the

presence of a stable institution like the church may provide comfort and assurance to children, regardless of the child's measurable participation in the programs or interpersonal community of the church.

Hypothesis Three proposed that the activity level of the parent and divorce would combine in an interactive effect which would increase the differences in the levels of social supports received by children of divorce and non-divorce children. Once again, little evidence was found in support of this hypothesis. However, useful results were also indirectly generated through the analysis of this data. A summary listing shows the results to be:

1. Divorced parents are much more likely to be inactive than are non-divorce parents.

2. On each of the four elements of social support, parent-active children of divorce were found to receive more supports from the church than were parent-inactive children of divorce.

3. Parent-inactive children of divorce were more likely to say they feel good when they are with people from their church, though this was also a group of children who received significantly fewer supports overall. Apparently an emotional bond exists between some children and the church that is not a product of either activity level or ministries received.

4. Parent-inactive children of divorce were more likely to receive counseling from the church than were non-divorce children. Once again it was shown that the church has some recognition of the needs of children of divorce or their parents, but, with the exception of counseling, the church was less likely or able to incorporate these

families into the normal ministries or social routines of the congregation.

5. The presence of the father's relatives in the congregation may be a key factor in the ongoing relationship between divorced families and a congregation. When a father's relatives, usually the relatives of the non-custodial parent, are in the congregation, divorced custodial parents (mother's) appear to be less active in the congregation.

In spite of this useful information, a central underlying issue of this chapter remains unanswered. That is, is the amount of support available to children in the Church of the Brethren effected by parental divorce? Or, are supports actually determined by the activity level of the child or parent? Evidence was presented which suggests that activity level of the child and parent does have a powerful effect. Does the data collected in this research provide information about the effects of divorce, or are the results of this research simply a product of activity level?

Unfortunately, as has been discussed in detail throughout the chapter, the answer is elusive. Main effects were found for both divorce and activity level. However, if the two factors work in an interactive fashion, then these main effects are misleading. Most importantly, the dilemma created by this uncertainty is in the inability of the data to guide and shape ministry and caregiving with children of divorce.

Perhaps a solution to the dilemma lies in recalling the underlying theological paradigm of the Brethren model of support--inclusion of all

persons in the healing and reconciling relationships of the faith community. The central issue with both children of divorce and non-divorce children is to discover ways that their inclusion in the community can be increased. The data did uncover some indications that all children may not be deeply supported by Brethren congregations. More pointedly, however, the results show clearly that children of divorce and their parents are inactive at higher rates than non-divorce children. And, those children of divorce who are inactive in the church, or have an inactive parent, receive extremely low levels of support.

The research is quite useful by pointing to this inactive group of children and their disaffection from the church. The clear conclusion is that as a general rule, the ministries of the church for divorcing families cannot be "left" to the normal routines of congregational life. Children of divorce, and divorced families as a whole, because of their unique circumstances and needs, will most likely not receive effective ministry from the church, however inadvertent.

#### Conclusion

In one study of the effect of divorce on social participation, Albrecht and others found that about forty percent of divorcing mothers become more active in social activities following divorce.<sup>9</sup> They became more active in clubs, family gatherings, classes, recreation, and so on. Yet another forty percent of the women maintained the same level of activity as they had prior to the divorce.<sup>10</sup> Yet the findings of

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<sup>9</sup>Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman, 129.

<sup>10</sup>Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman, 129-30.



this research suggest that the same might not be true of the church.

The issue that arises out of this research, more than any other, is how the church can provide supports to children and families who are more inactive in the life of the congregation. This data is especially important for the Church of the Brethren which emphasizes community life as a context for ministry. The next chapter will deal more directly with the implications of this research data on the model of caregiving for children of divorce through life in the faith community.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusions

As was anticipated, the survey of this thesis discovered that the divorce rate among Church of the Brethren adults is slightly lower than that of the United States as a whole. In Chapter 5 it was noted that the divorce rate among Brethren adults in the year preceding this survey was 4.3 divorces per one thousand persons. The most recent statistics available, 1987, show the divorce rate in the United States is 4.8 divorces per one thousand persons.<sup>1</sup> However, while the divorce rate is lower than the average, there is still a fair incidence of divorce in the Church of the Brethren. In addition, divorce is undoubtedly present in the larger community surrounding Brethren churches. The focal point of this thesis, exploring support for divorcing families within Brethren congregations, appears to be relevant and needed.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the various elements developed in the thesis--theories of divorce, Brethren statements on divorce, and empirical research--into a series of conclusions about social supports for children of divorce in the Church of the Brethren. The goal is to interpret the findings of my research in light of the needs of children of divorce and in light of Brethren statements of intent to care for children of divorce. Of particular

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<sup>1</sup>USBC, Statistical Abstract: 1989, Table 134, 88.

statements of intent to care for children of divorce. Of particular interest is to reflect on the effectiveness of the Brethren model of support for Brethren families through the life of the faith community.

The chapter is divided into four sections: (1) reflections on theories about divorce, (2) reflections on theories about social supports for divorcing families, (3) reflections on the Church of the Brethren as a social support, and (4) reflections on the relevance of this thesis for other denominational settings and ministry with children of divorce in general. In addition, suggestions are made for further study of the issues raised in this thesis.

### Theoretical Considerations

#### Reflections on Theories of Divorce

In Chapter 2, two theoretical perspectives on divorce were outlined--intrapsychic and social. In the intrapsychic approach emphasis is placed on the internal emotional processes of the individual child. Divorce affects the child's emotional development, particularly identification with parents in the formation of ego. Children's responses to divorce are viewed as grief responses, caused by the loss of significant love objects. Pathology develops in children as a result of the idealization of the absent parent and an attempt to fuse with them emotionally as a way of maintaining a relationship. Fusion and idealization disrupt the child's own normal development process. Therapy for children of divorce is aimed at emotional catharsis to resolve grief and restore the development of ego. Social supports are important, however secondarily, as they minimize the child's feelings of loss.

The social view is built on a contrasting set of assumptions. In this view the individual is seen to exist within the context of a relational network. Divorce affects not only the individual but the relational network as well. Divorce is seen as an amoral event. That is, divorce is neither good nor evil, rather it is similar to many other life transitions--births, deaths, marriage, etc. Divorce is not a singular event, rather it is a process of disorganization and then subsequent reorganization of family relational patterns. Dysfunction occurs when post-divorce relationships are not accepted by family members--by individuals or sub-groups of the family (children, grandparents, etc.). Therapy with divorcing families is aimed at clarifying and negotiating post-divorce relational patterns and enabling their smooth functioning. In addition, the economic and social disruptions that often follow divorce may be more harmful to children of divorce than is the divorce. Supportive interventions with divorcing families can also be aimed at minimizing the social disorganization of divorce.

The findings of this thesis appear to support the social theory. Though this research did not attempt to explore the internal functioning of children interviewed, results which were gathered are more consistent with the view that divorce has a significant impact on the social network of the divorcing family. Quite simply, these results suggest that the divorce of the marital couple has an effect on children and on the relationship between children and the church they attend. The marital dyad cannot be considered in isolation. These results show that the effects of divorce reach far beyond the couple

and the nuclear family. The child is affected in ways which are much broader than the disruption of the intrapsychic development of ego. Divorce might more accurately be defined as the breakup of an entire constellation of relationships surrounding the marital couple, with disruptions to a variety of family ties, friendship loyalties, and economic circumstances.

If the social theory of divorce is supported by this research, then a number of implications can be identified for Church of the Brethren congregations and their ministry with children of divorce:

1. If circumstances surrounding divorce are likely to cause a disruption in the relationship between divorcing families and congregations--due to economic changes, return to work of custodial parent, extended family breakup, etc.--the Brethren appear to be correct in identifying divorce as a "brokenness" in the congregation as a whole and not only a brokenness within one nuclear family of the fellowship.

2. Congregations may want to adopt an attitude of an active participant in divorce, rather than that of a reluctant or passive observer. As congregations identify themselves as co-participants in divorce, they might actively extend the fellowship of the congregation to divorcing families to meet their spiritual and social needs. This attitude and activity would be in contrast to a passive waiting for divorcing families to determine their relationship with a congregation which views itself as unchanged by divorce. When the possibility of a divorce becomes known to the church, steps might even be taken prior to divorce to aid and support the family and to minimize negative

disruptions in the relationships of the faith community.

3. If disruptions in the social network or the economic stability of the family are the locus of some of the damage caused by divorce, then any steps taken by the church to moderate the disruptions will support the well-being of divorcing persons or family members. For example, simply by taking steps to maintain ongoing, consistent friendships with children of divorce, friendships which may have been existent prior to the divorce, the congregation may lessen some of the effects of divorce. For example, if adults provide "play opportunities" for children in the church who are friends, they help maintain consistency and familiarity in the child's social network.

4. If divorce has a disorganizing effect on the larger social network of families, then the church may want to take steps to mediate relationships between persons who are related to the divorcing nuclear family. For example, the church may want to work for reconciliation in the relationship between the parents of the husband and the parents of the wife, both of whom might be members of the same congregation. Or, the congregation might want to work for reconciliation in the relationship between adults in the church who are part of a friendship network and have been divided in their loyalties to a divorcing person. The friendship between two unrelated persons in the church might be disrupted as one becomes more loyal to the divorcing wife, while the other becomes more loyal to the divorcing husband. Indirectly, such interventions will aid the divorcing family by maintaining their support network.

#### Reflections on Social Support Theory

Perhaps the central issue of this thesis has been to discover whether the church is a source of support for children of divorce. This author proposed in Hypothesis One that children of divorce receive more social support from Brethren congregations than do children from non-divorce homes. However, this was not found to be true. In fact, the evidence suggests that the church may not actually be a strong source of support for divorcing persons. Children of divorce generally receive fewer supports from the church than non-divorce children and do not feel the church was helpful to them following divorce. In addition, children of divorce and their parents are less active in the church, further diminishing the availability of supports from congregations. More pointedly, few specifically divorce-related ministries were found in Church of the Brethren congregations.

However, not surprisingly, the findings do suggest that children of divorce who are associated with a Brethren congregation do find more supports from the church than do children from the general population. Wallerstein and Kelly, in their study of general population children, found that only five percent of the children had ever talked to a clergyman about divorce.<sup>2</sup> Among the children of this study, fourteen percent had talked to a minister about divorce.

In addition, in one of the more useful findings of the study, it was discovered that an informal friendship network exists in churches that may be a significant source of support for a number of children. More than thirty percent of the children in this study had talked with a friend in the church about their parent's divorce (CQ 20g). Again this

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<sup>2</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 43.

is in some contrast to Wallerstein and Kelly, who implied that friends are a source of support, but in large part only because they provide activities for children which distract them from the divorce experience.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Wallerstein and Kelly suggest that for the children in their study, friends were not a useful source of support in dealing with divorce-related emotions or experiences.<sup>4</sup> In this research it was found on CQ 20, that next to "mothers," friends were the single greatest source of support for children of divorce in Brethren congregations.

While the number of children of divorce who reported that they had talked to friends about the divorce was less than a majority, the indication is that friends may have the potential to be a greater support to many other children. Further study needs to be conducted to determine the effectiveness of this friendship support network. Also, further work needs to be done by the church to determine ways in which this informal support network can become an intentional part of caring for children of divorce. Congregations may want to develop programs of peer support and counseling for children of divorce.

The findings of this research also reflect on another area of social support theory--the definition of social supports and their measurement in empirical research. The assumption was made in this thesis that social supports could be measured through four "elements" of support--activity level, interpersonal involvements, emotional bond, and specific support ministries. A number of sources were cited to

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<sup>3</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 44.

<sup>4</sup>Wallerstein and Kelly, 44.



validate this assumption. The findings suggest that this was a useful method of research on social supports.

As various groups of children were compared with one another, the strength of each of these four elements changed through the introduction of various research factors. Apparently, social supports are complex concepts which cannot be understood or measured fully through single-focus procedures. These findings suggest, for example, that an incomplete picture of social supports would be generated by recording only contact with supportive persons or agencies--in other words, activity level. Nor, as was done in some research, does it develop a complete understanding of social supports to measure supports according to the nature of their source, as formal or informal supports. Under the general concept of social supports, various elements or forms of caregiving can be isolated and a variety of sources of support can be discovered. For example, as has been cited, the emotional bond between children of divorce and the church was at times found to be strong, even when the activity level of the child was slight. Support was conveyed to children in one form, emotional support, even though contact with support sources was uncertain or absent. And, within the broader category of the church, a variety of supports were isolated--emotional support, interpersonal support, support ministries, etc.

This author's impression is that the concept of social supports is not well developed in the literature, nor is their adequate clarity of operational definitions. Future research must define more completely the various elements and forms of social support--emotional,

interpersonal, activity, programmatic--within the broader categories of support sources--formal supports, informal supports, institutional supports, religious supports, interpersonal supports, etc.

Reflections on Children of Divorce and  
the Church of the Brethren

The unique contribution of the Church of the Brethren to this thesis has been the model of caregiving for children of divorce through the interpersonal life of the faith community. The research findings have interesting and useful implications for ministry with children of divorce in light of this model.

First, and perhaps most importantly, concerns about the effectiveness of this model of ministry with all children are raised. As was cited in Chapter 5, the conclusion of this author was that while Brethren children seem to like their churches and may feel emotionally bonded to the church, they participate at only moderate rates and they do not appear to find their congregation to be a place of support in coping with important things in their lives. On CQ 7, fewer than twenty percent of Brethren children and adolescents report that they regularly talk to anyone in the church about things that are important to them. In addition, on CQ 5, less than one-third of the youth had participated in activities aimed specifically at children or adolescents in the six months prior to the survey, with the single exception of Sunday School. While the vast majority of the young people had participated in all-church events--worship, pot-luck dinners--few had participated in events such as youth groups, camps, sports teams, or youth retreats. Either the majority of Brethren congregations do not have youth

oriented events, or the programs which do exist fail to attract young people. In addition, the answers to CQ 5 and CQ 7 together suggest that when young people attend all-church events the issues and concerns which are "important" to them are not being dealt with in a helpful way. As has been cited in Chapter 1, divorce is effecting the lives of approximately one-third of all the young people in the United States. Yet, few children of divorce talk with anyone in the church about divorce. If such a major social phenomenon is not being addressed helpfully in Brethren congregations, one doubts that other issues are being dealt with any more effectively.

This author concludes that while the model of ministry through life in the community may help to create a feeling of inclusion in the community among Brethren young people, efforts need to be made to develop more effective programs specifically for children and adolescents. This author would suggest three kinds of ministries and programs that would be especially useful for children of divorce and, hopefully, for all children: (1) informal programs that provide settings for interpersonal encounters among children and youth, to facilitate the supports available through friendships; (2) recruitment and training of church leaders who are able to communicate intimately with young people about life-concerns and issues that are important to them; and (3) the development of programs that deal directly and educationally with issues such as divorce which are clearly a part of the young person's life. Such programs should obviously be aimed at young people, but parents and the congregation as a whole should be included as well to inform them about issues and concerns facing

children and youth.

In addition, the research of this thesis also reflects on caregiving specifically with children of divorce through life in the faith community. In Chapter 3, this author proposed that there were three core elements of the theology of community as it is found in the Church of the Brethren: common identity, common discipline, and common mission. This author has proposed that these three elements relate to the instance of divorce by attempting to include the divorced person into the life of the community, to seek faithful responses to God's leading when divorce occurs, and to respond with care to those who have divorced through shared love and concrete ministries to satisfy divorce-related needs.

As mentioned, the findings of this research supports the conclusion of the Church of the Brethren, 1977 Annual Conference statement on divorce and remarriage, in which divorce is described as an event which impacts the community. Divorce is seen as "brokenness" in the community.<sup>5</sup> All persons in the community are involved in the event of divorce, sharing in the brokenness and sharing in the process of reconciliation.<sup>6</sup> However the findings of the thesis also suggest some additional conclusions about the impact of divorce on the community--both on the theology of community and the practice of ministry with divorcing persons. In a sense, these findings contribute to a theology of divorce based upon the ideal of the faith community.

First, divorce affects the common identity of the community.

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<sup>5</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. I.

<sup>6</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. I.

Divorce is not an event which happens during a limited time period, in which the community copes temporarily, aiding the divorcing family, and then "moves on," or "returns" to "normal." Instead, divorce in one family appears to be an event which alters life in the entire community "forever." The survey of this thesis did show that in those few families who were within two years of divorce, there was a greatly diminished level of participation in the church. But, for divorced families as a whole, regardless of the amount of time since the divorce, the relationship with the church was measurably different than that of non-divorce families. The question must then be asked, "Can the faith community incorporate the divorce event into its ongoing life?" More than simply suggesting that the church should minister to divorcing families, the issue is one of incorporating the divorce event and its consequences into the consciousness and relational life of the congregation.

More directly stated, the focal issue is that of inclusion of divorced families and the divorce experience into the faith community. Because of the apparent tendency for divorced families to be more inactive, those in the faith community will need to "extend" the community towards the divorced in order to remain in community with them. If the divorced are less active in the church, the faith community will need to go to some efforts to pursue relationships with the divorced. As was noted throughout Chapter 5, in every measurement of support ministries, divorced families received fewer home visits than any group of non-divorced families. Though many divorced children and adults received counseling from the church, showing a recognition

of some of the needs of divorced people, fewer of the divorced received the more community-inclusive ministry of home visits. Perhaps the divorced are less active in the community, but the community may also be less active in their desire to be in relationship with the divorced.

One implication of a common identity with those Brethren who are divorced, is an awareness that the relationships of the community will become more "fluid" and less static or fixed. To incorporate the divorced will mean accepting new and perhaps unfamiliar family forms--single-parent families, blended families, partial family groups, and non-traditional relationship styles. In order to do this, relationships in the faith community must be conceived of not as unaffected or unchanged by divorce, but instead reshaped by the event. Those in the community must allow the life of the community to be shaped by the new insights into caring in relationships that post-divorced living and family configurations offer. New configurations of relationships in the faith community will also need to be accepted. Because of the nature of divorce, all post-divorce relational patterns may tend to be more chaotic and less routine, at least in the period immediately following the marital dissolution. Divorced persons may become less regular as divorced families become less "faithful" in attendance at community events. The feeling will need to be one of being "in community" with divorced persons, while also being "out of contact" with them.

This sense of common identity with the divorced, that each person not only ministers to the divorced but is also reshaped by divorce, also has an impact on the common discipline of the community. The

overall findings of this research, including the earlier review of theories on divorce, suggests that in addition to acknowledging the pain or "brokenness" of divorce, the Brethren may also want to acknowledge the "renewal" or "reorganization" of persons' lives that also comes through divorce.

In their common discipline the Brethren search together to find God's leading and direction in each situation and every life event. The same can be true of divorce as the Brethren form into community with divorced families to discover those ways in which they can respond faithfully to God's leading toward renewal and new life in the divorce event. In their 1977 statement the Brethren acknowledge that when some persons decide to divorce, they do so "in light of their faith," or after considering their responsibilities and commitments as Christians.<sup>7</sup> The statement also acknowledges the need for divorced persons to "move beyond" divorce and accept the "grace of God's redemption ... [as] the means to a new life."<sup>8</sup> In addition to the belief in forgiveness and grace for the divorced, which leads to renewal, the Brethren might also see divorce as an opportunity of renewal for the community. If divorce is seen as an incident of reorganization and transition, and not as an event of pathology, as indicated in Chapter 2, perhaps divorce can then become an event through which God speaks to the community. In their 1977 statement the Brethren acknowledge that out of death comes resurrection.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>7</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. III.A.

<sup>8</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. III.A.

<sup>9</sup>Church of the Brethren, Marriage and Divorce, Sec. III.A.

the view can also be adopted that out of disorganization and reorganization, out of divorce, renewal or new life can be found as well.

Such a view of divorce also has interesting implications for Brethren beliefs in the Priesthood of all Believers. As was outlined in Chapter 3, the Brethren believe that life in the community is to be seen as a "sacrament," because it is through relationships in community that God's grace is conveyed to persons.<sup>10</sup> Persons in the community are priests to one another as they convey grace (administer the sacraments) through their shared love. In understanding that divorce is an event of renewal, or an event through which new direction from God can be found, there is a sense in which the divorced persons become the priests to the community. The images of divorce and ministry with divorcing persons are radically shifted. Along with the ministry for divorced persons by non-divorced persons, there is now a sense in which divorced persons minister to the community by leading to the discovery of God's new directions.

In addition to the image of a shared priesthood, which is part of the common discipline of the community, this research and discussion has an impact on the common mission. This author would outline five implications for community life and ministry:

1. As mentioned earlier, ministry with divorcing families needs to be based upon an image of a more "fluid community." The community needs to adopt the realization that relationships with divorcing persons are often temporary and transitional. Contacts with divorcing

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<sup>10</sup>Groff, "Brethren Identity and Unity," 200.



families may be at one time intense and regular, at other times distant and infrequent. The faith community may have contact with only subgroups of families, or only one individual in a family. Perhaps the community may have a relationship with a child of divorce and not with siblings or parents. And, the community may provide temporary or specific supports for children of divorce, or divorced families, and have no further contact with them whatsoever. Finally, the community might support one divorced family simply by enabling them to form a relationship with another neighboring faith community. If it is true that divorced families have difficulty attending a congregation which contains extended family members, or family members of the "ex-spouse," then the congregation may want to help the divorced family find a new church with fewer complications from the pre-divorce network. One person who may be a particular focus of this kind of "referral" ministry is the ex-husband. This research clearly demonstrated that many times the ex-husband loses contact altogether with the church. Perhaps that distance can be overcome through simply introducing the father to a minister or laypersons of a different congregation.

2. Specific ministries for children of divorce and divorced families as a whole do need to be developed. Though much of the emphasis in this discussion has been on caregiving through relationships of the community, that does not diminish the need for specific support services. Examples have been given throughout this thesis: child care, financial support, transportation, divorce mediation around visitation and custody concerns, divorce counseling, education for single-parenting, etc.

3. One specific divorce ministry that was highlighted in some detail in Chapter 2 was divorce recovery groups for children. The setting of the church was noted as advantageous to such groups because churches have established relationships with children, peer group support is naturally available, the church is normally a place of values clarification, and so on. Groups for children have as goals the expression of divorce-related emotions and learning problem solving skills for coping with divorce-related conflicts.

4. The congregation would provide a valuable source of support for children by encouraging the informal friendships that develop among children in the congregation. One possibility would be a program of peer "counseling" among children and adolescents.

5. As divorce is an event which impacts relationships in the entire social network of the divorcing family, a focus on reconciliation between persons only indirectly related to the divorce would be in order. Examples of such relationships might be between the in-laws of both ex-spouses, or friends who have become distant from one another because of divided loyalties to the ex-spouses. Another relationship that is sometimes broken following divorce is between pastors and members of the church. For example, the pastor may be seen to be in an alliance with one or the other spouse, to the exclusion and dismay of others in the congregation. Mediation of these relationships in the larger social network of the divorcing family is a form of support for the divorced.

#### Reflections on Children of Divorce and the Larger Church

The question must be asked about the applicability of these

findings about the Church of the Brethren to other denominations. Several factors appear to support the conclusion that some aspects of this thesis are generalizable for other settings. With the exception of the results from the ANOVA, the majority of the findings reached a very high level of statistical significance. Though there was uncertainty about the "interaction effect" of divorce and activity level upon social supports, there was little doubt about the "main effect" of the two variables. That is, both divorce and activity level were found with assurance to have an effect on the levels of social supports children receive from Brethren congregations. The strength of the findings suggests that the same might be true for other churches.

Also, these findings are consistent with many of the conclusions from the study cited earlier on divorce among the Mennonites. For Brethren, as for Mennonites, the divorce rate of adults is lower than the national average.<sup>11</sup> Brethren young persons from divorced homes, as was true of Mennonite youth, were less likely to be active in the church.<sup>12</sup> However, the findings do not correspond with other studies which suggest that among church "drop-outs," the rate of divorce is no higher than among other populations of adults.<sup>13</sup> Among inactive Brethren adults, the rate of divorce is much higher.

Further study is needed before it could be said with assurance that the results of this thesis apply to other church settings. Also, based on this study, little can be said about the social supports

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<sup>11</sup>Driedger, Yoder, and Sawatzky, 373.

<sup>12</sup>Driedger, Yoder, and Sawatzky, 93.

<sup>13</sup>Perry, et al., 397.

available to children of divorce in secular social institutions--Boys and Girls Clubs, scouting programs, school clubs, etc. The speculation could be made that activity level is likely to be important in the levels of supports received by children of divorce in any group. A logical "next step" in the research process of this thesis would be to replicate the study with a random sample of children from a variety of church populations and with a sample of children from the "general population."

However, with these cautions in mind, this author does propose that some of the findings appear to be applicable to a variety of church settings. For the most part, churches do have contact with whole family groupings, at least, nuclear families. Divorce is likely to disrupt a family's relationship with the church, regardless of the church. Most likely, churches lose contact with members of divorcing families. Intentional efforts to maintain the relationship with divorcing persons would seem to be necessary for most churches. Specific ministries for divorced persons would appear useful in all church settings as would the informal supports available through friendships and other common church programs. And, finally, for most churches, as is true of the Brethren, ministry with divorced persons has relevance for the church's outreach to the non-churched community. As was cited at the outset of this thesis, divorce is a fact of life in every American community. If any church is to minister effectively to modern communities they will need to be able to minister to divorced persons and families.

### Recommendations

Several recommendations for ministry with divorcing families have been made throughout this dissertation. At this point, however, it might be useful to summarize those recommendations in one list.

Growing out of the research of this project, this author recommends the following areas of focus for ministries with children of divorce and their families:

1. When divorce seems inevitable in a family, provide education and counseling prior to divorce which will help them anticipate some of the problems and emotions they will encounter.
2. Provide mediation or counseling services which will facilitate conflict management or custody decisions for divorcing couples.
3. Offer support groups for children of divorce.
4. Establish ministries with sub-groups of families. Realizing the oftentimes chaotic nature of post-divorce family organizations, churches should attempt to have a relationship with "as much of the family" as is possible. At times the church may have a relationship with non-custodial parents and their visiting children. Programs that could include only occasional contact with visiting children would be invaluable.
5. Formalize the supportive informal friendship networks among children through peer counseling, peer groups, or "intentional friendships."
6. Sponsor supports and divorce recovery groups designed specifically for younger boys, seven to ten years old, which would meet the needs of one group of children who are identified in the literature

as especially troubled by divorce.

7. Develop "non-traditional" ministries for divorcing families: worship occasions for those who work odd hours, single-parent social clubs, career and personal development classes, marriage ceremonies which attempt to unite all members of "blended" families, etc.

8. Make use of divorce "ceremonies" which "blesses" the divorce, recognizing the changed status of divorcing families, and committing the support of the church to nurture the new divorced family, much as the church does in marriage.

9. Offer courses to enhance parenting skills, especially to offer education on single-parenting, joint-custody parenting, and non-custodial parenting.

10. Develop "foster parent" programs. With an acknowledgement that at times custodial parents are unable to fully supervise their children--due to busy schedules, work, personal divorce recovery, etc.--develop supportive relationships between families so that other adults can "fill-in" for the custodial parent at a variety of times, on a regular and a "drop-in" basis.

11. Develop the ability to provide concrete supports for divorcing families such as financial aid, child care, transportation, housing, meals, educational grants, temporary employment opportunities through church members, etc.

12. Identify specific persons within the church community who can be trained in divorce counseling and mediation. When requested, "assign" these persons to work specifically with one divorcing family in whatever ways are necessary. This person can serve as a mediator

in maintaining the relationship between the divorcing family and the church. If this is a layperson in the church, it would symbolize that care for divorcing families is the "responsibility" of the entire fellowship. Also, such a program would not leave ministry with divorcing persons to the overly busy pastor.

13. Provide divorce mediation counseling with persons who are not in the nuclear family but are indirectly affected by divorce. As has been cited, divorce mediation also is needed in relationships between extended family members, in-laws, friendship groups, Sunday School classes, etc. who are affected by divorce. Wherever relationships exist that have become troubled or conflicted because of divorce such a ministry would be valuable.

14. Develop divorce recovery groups as an effort of evangelism and ministry to the larger community. Such groups would need to be undertaken with the understanding that participation does not have implications for subsequent membership in the church. That is, these groups would need to be offered simply in a desire to meet the needs of persons in the community, and not to "bring them into the church." Because of the nature of post-divorce families, they may not have the ability to participate fully in the life of a church.

#### Areas for Further Study

Hopefully, this thesis will prove to be a starting point for further research into the relationship between children of divorce and the church. Suggestions for further study have been made at various points and several others which occur to this author could yet be mentioned. A brief listing of these research topics may prove helpful:

1. As was mentioned, a replication of this study with a broad sampling of churches would indicate the validity of the findings for other faith groups. Some efforts could be made to discover the influence of denominational history and positions toward divorce as a factor in the levels of support available to children of divorce.

2. For the church of the Brethren, a general study of the health and effectiveness of ministries with children is in order.

3. A study needs to be undertaken with families in the time period immediately following divorce. This study has found that families may have an especially distant relationship with the church in the immediate months after a divorce. However, it was also found in this study that families in this situation may be difficult to include in studies. A case study method might be more effective with this group.

4. One very important factor that needs further examination is the influence of the father, particularly if his participation in a church community ceases. For the most part this study dealt with the influence of the mother's activity level as a factor, simply because mother's most often filled out the parent's questionnaires. Related issue are the effects of joint custody and visitation arrangements on children's relationships with congregations. When children become irregular participants in churches the level of social supports appears to diminish. Potential ways in which the congregation can maintain relationships with both mother and father following divorce need to be developed.

5. In light of this thesis, important questions arise about the



effects of step-parents and blended families on the relationship with the church. One question asked in this thesis was the effect of parental activity level on social supports for children. The same question needs to be answered about the activity level, or general religious affiliation, of step-parents.

6. A useful study would be to examine the relationship between attitudes toward divorce by individuals within congregations and the levels of social supports available to children of divorce. This thesis outlined many denominational positions toward divorce and children, but that may not accurately reflect the atmosphere in a specific congregation toward divorce. One possibility is that attitudes toward divorce of individual congregations, particularly of congregational leaders and pastors, may be the overriding factor in that congregation's ability and desire to be in community with divorcing families.

7. Finally, further study needs to be made of models of ministry that might be more effective for the church's ministry with children of divorce in the larger, non-churched community. This thesis has at points questioned the effectiveness of caregiving through inclusion in the community. The question may be asked, "Are there other more useful foundations for supporting children of divorce?"

### Conclusion

Brethren support for children of divorce revolves around two focal points, their vision and their practices. While the vision of caring for children through life in the community is admirable, and even quite effective at some points, if that is the single basis for ministry with

divorcing families, it may deny the essential nature of the divorce experience. Divorce is in large part the breakup of a community. The findings of this research suggest that many divorcing families may find it difficult or even impossible to maintain ongoing, frequent contacts with the church. The family as a whole, or at least some parts of the family, may lose contact with the church. The hope for effective ministry with divorcing families may lie in learning to be "in community" with persons while being out of contact with them.

Because of this reality, the focus shifts onto the practices of support for children of divorce and all divorcing persons. Almost no programs or ministries were found to exist in the Church of the Brethren which were aimed specifically at meeting the uniquely divorce-related needs of children of divorce or their families. Though this thesis has placed great emphasis on the definition and measurement of a wide variety of elements and forms of social support, perhaps they are all dependent upon demonstrations of support through concrete programs and interventions. One clear way to express the desire to be in community with divorcing families is to provide them with specific and concrete supports.

On the bottom of one of the parent's questionnaires returned in the survey, a comment was written which is especially relevant to these dual concerns. It also summarizes the findings of all the data gathered in this research. The parent wrote, "They [the church] express a desire to minister but don't know how or what to do. We feel alone, often invisible."

At the outset of this thesis the author expressed the hope that an

effective Brethren ministry for children of divorce would be found in Church of the Brethren congregations. While that hope has been partially realized through the Brethren desire to care for all divorcing persons, and through the discovery of some informal forms of effective support, overall the hope has not been fulfilled. However, the author suspects that the Brethren are not alone in this problem. That is, they likely share this difficulty with all churches. The thesis has discovered that this is an especially difficult group of people to serve. However, the hope is also felt that this thesis is a starting point for more effective support for children and families of divorce.

**Appendix A**  
**Materials Sent to Churches**

May 21, 1989

Rev. Jim Miller  
Oregon-Washington District  
Church of the Brethren  
P.O. Box 16366  
Portland, Or. 97216-0366

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to enlist your participation in a study of children in the Church of the Brethren. This study is part of my Ph.D. thesis in pastoral counseling at the School of Theology at Claremont, California.

Your congregation has been selected through sampling procedures from the Church of the Brethren directory. I'm seeking your help to gather names and addresses of a sample group of children in the Church of the Brethren.

As an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, and a pastoral counselor, I have an interest in ministry with children, especially children of divorce. The purpose of this project is to study the various ways children participate in the life of Brethren congregations, particularly ways children of divorce participate.

Would you please participate in this study by sending me a list of the names and addresses of the children in your congregation between 8 and 16 years of age? Would you especially signify those children whose parents have divorced during in the last few years? If it proves cumbersome to create a complete list, would you please send at least the names and addresses of the children of divorce and an equal number of children chosen randomly from non-divorce homes. Enclosed is a form for your use. Also, if you prefer, please feel free to simply enclose a copy of your church directory, indicating children of divorce and those from non-divorce homes. You'll also find a stamped, return envelope for your use. Just drop the envelope in the mail with the stamps that are affixed and, if necessary, any postage due will be taken care of at this end.

A group of children will be drawn from the names gathered from across the Church of the Brethren. These children and their parents will be contacted directly by mail. They will be asked about their involvement and participation in the life of the church. There will be no sensitive or confidential questions. For those children of divorce, nothing whatsoever will be asked about the divorce. In addition, a variety of methods will be used to protect the confidentiality of everyone participating in this study. Those returning questionnaires will not be asked to supply their names or addresses. No names will be used in the dissertation itself and the names and addresses of all

persons will be kept confidential.

You will also notice that I'm asking you to answer several questions on the form included with this letter. They will take only a couple of minutes to complete. Even if you do not have children of divorce in your church, or choose not to send any names, would you please answer these questions and send the form back to me. Your participation is valuable and helpful. As you may know, in studies like this any response you send is important.

You might be interested to know that this project is known and endorsed by several leaders of the Church of the Brethren. Enclosed you will find letters of reference from Don Miller, General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren, and Jan Eller, District Minister of my own district--Oregon/Washington.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of my requests and your participation in this study. My hope is that this study will prove helpful to all of us. If you should have any questions about the project please feel free to contact me. My home phone number is 503-873-4717.

If you would be interested in a summary of the results of this project I will gladly send it to you when the study is completed. There is a space to indicate your desire to get the summary.

Thanks for your help!

Sincerely,

Rev. Jim Miller

Children in the Church of the Brethren:  
Survey Return Form

\*\*\*\*\*

Please answer the following questions:

1. Number of adults in your church: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Number of divorced adults in the church: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Number of persons divorcing in the last 12 months: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Number of children under 16 in the church: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Number of children under 16 whose parents are divorced: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

\_\_\_\_\_ Check if you wish a summary of the study results.

\*\*\*\*\*

Please return both survey forms in the enclosed envelope, or return to:

Rev. Jim Miller  
%Oregon-Washington District  
Church of the Brethren  
P.O. Box 16366  
Portland, Or. 97216-0366  
  
(Phone) 503-873-4717

Thanks for your help!

Please list the names and addresses of all children in your congregation who are between the ages of 8 and 16. Please check the names of those children whose parents have divorced in the last several years.

Name

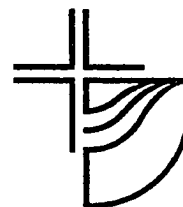
Address

Check if Child  
of Divorce



**Church of the Brethren General Board**

1451 Dundee Avenue Elgin, Illinois 60120 312 742 5100



Church of the Brethren

July 22, 1988

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to introduce Rev. Jim Miller to you. I have known Jim since his seminary days at Bethany Theological Seminary in the early 1970's. He is an ordained minister in good standing in the Church of the Brethren. Currently, he is a pastoral counselor in Salem, Oregon, and is working on a Ph.D. at the School of Theology at Claremont, California.

As part of his Ph.D. thesis, Jim is conducting a survey of divorced families in the Church of the Brethren. His goal is to discover ways that the church can be caring and helpful to families who are experiencing divorce. I urge you to participate in Jim's study as he is exploring an important topic and his results will be helpful to all of us in ministry in the Church of the Brethren.

Thank you for your consideration of Jim's request and your participation in this worthwhile project.

Sincerely yours,

*Donald E. Miller*

Donald E. Miller  
General Secretary

/dkm

APPENDIX B

Materials Sent to Children and Parents

June 18, 1989

Rev. Jim Miller  
Oregon-Washington District  
Church of the Brethren  
P.O. Box 16366  
Portland, Or. 97216-0366

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to get your help in a study of children's participation in the Church of the Brethren. Your name, along with other families, was supplied by your church. Families are being contacted across the entire country. Will you take 5 minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaires about how you participate in your church?

I have been a minister in the Church of the Brethren for 17 years and am interested in children and teens. This study is for my Ph.D. thesis at the School of Theology at Claremont, California.

The survey is confidential. Please do not sign your name. Your name will never be used or given to anyone. You may see a number on the questionnaire. This is so reminder letters will not be sent to those who return questionnaires. When your questionnaires are returned no contact will be made to ask any further questions.

Parents, only one parent will need to fill out a questionnaire. If more than one of your children happen to receive this survey, you'll only need to fill out one parent's questionnaire. Enclose all your family's questionnaires in one return envelope. If you have questions, please call me at my home, 503-873-4717.

Thanks for your participation! Your answers will help us better understand the needs of young people in the Church of the Brethren.

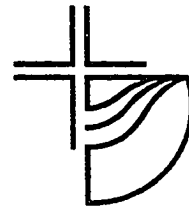
Sincerely,

Rev. Jim Miller

**Church of the Brethren General Board**

1451 Dundee Avenue Elgin, Illinois 60120 312 742 5100

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July 22, 1989

Church of the Brethren

Dear Friends,

This letter is to encourage you to participate in a study of families being conducted by Rev. Jim Miller.

I have known Jim since his seminary days at Bethany Theological Seminary in the early 1970's. He is an ordained minister in good standing in the Church of the Brethren. Currently, he is a pastoral counselor in Salem, Oregon, and is working on a Ph.D. at the School of Theology at Claremont, California.

As part of his Ph.D. thesis, Jim is conducting a survey of families in the Church of the Brethren and their pattern of participation in activities in the church. His goal is to discover ways that the church can be caring and helpful to families with children.

Because people are sometimes sensitive about questions concerning family life, Jim has pledged to keep individual responses confidential. His thesis will contain only a general summary.

In the Goals for the '90s statement, the Annual Conference has asked the churches to give attention to family life. Jim's thesis has the promise of being helpful to the larger church. Again I encourage you to participate in Jim's study as he is exploring this important topic.

Sincerely,

*Donald E. Miller*

Donald E. Miller  
General Secretary

s

Questionnaire for Children and Youth

I would like to ask you some questions about your church. The questions are about the things you do at your church. The questions are for children between 8 and 16 years old. Please answer all the questions. If you need help reading ask your parents. I won't be asking you for your name. I will be the only one who ever sees your answers. Thank you for answering these question.

=====

1. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_ YEARS
2. Are you a: (circle a number)
  1. BOY
  2. GIRL
3. Have you been baptized or joined your church? (circle a number)
  1. YES
  2. NO
4. How long have you gone to your church?: \_\_\_\_\_ YEARS
5. What things have you done at your church in the last six months:  
(please check as many as you have done)
 

(a) _____ ATTEND WORSHIP	(g) _____ SUNDAY SCHOOL
(b) _____ SING IN A CHOIR	(h) _____ SPORTS TEAM
(c) _____ JR. HI. OR YOUTH RETREATS	(i) _____ JR. HI. OR YOUTH GROUP
(d) _____ CAMPS	(j) _____ POT-LUCK DINNERS
(e) _____ EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH	
(f) _____ LIST ANY OTHER THINGS YOU HAVE DONE _____	

(On the following questions please circle a number anywhere on the scale of 1 to 5 that is closest to how you feel.)

6. How often do you do things at your church?
 

SEVERAL  
TIMES A WEEK    1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5    ALMOST NEVER
7. Do you ever talk to anyone at your church about things that are important to you?
 

YES, ALL THE TIME    1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5    NO, NEVER

Please turn this sheet over and finish the questions on the back)

8. Are there other kids in the church who are your age?

YES, A LOT 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 NO, NONE

9. Do you like to go to your church?

YES, A LOT 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 NO, NOT AT ALL

10. Do you feel good when you are with people from your church?

YES, VERY GOOD 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 NO, NOT GOOD AT ALL

11. Do any of the people in your church ever come to your house?  
(circle a number)

- 1. YES
- 2. NO

12. Do you go to their house? (circle a number)

- 1. YES
- 2. NO

13. Do you eat at their house? (circle a number)

- 1. YES
- 2. NO

14. Do they eat at your house? (circle a number)

- 1. YES
- 2. NO

15. Do you have relatives in your church? (please check)

(Your mom's family)

- (a) \_\_\_\_\_ GRANDPARENTS
- (b) \_\_\_\_\_ AUNTS, UNCLES
- (c) \_\_\_\_\_ COUSINS
- (d) \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER

(Your dad's family)

- (e) \_\_\_\_\_ GRANDPARENTS
- (h) \_\_\_\_\_ AUNTS, UNCLES
- (i) \_\_\_\_\_ COUSINS
- (j) \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER

Thank you for answering these questions. Next we would like to ask some more questions about the church to those kids whose parents have been divorced. If your parents have been divorced would you please answer the questions on the next page. If your parents have not divorced, you are done. Thank you.

These questions ask a little more about your church. If your parents have been divorced would you please answer the questions on this page.  
\*\*\*\*\*

(On the next few questions please circle the number anywhere on the scale of 1 to 5 that is closest to how you feel)

16. Since your parents have been divorced, do you do things at church more or less than before they were divorced?

I DO I DO  
THINGS MORE 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 THINGS LESS  
ABOUT  
THE SAME

17. Do you feel your church helped you after your parents divorced?

YES, A LOT 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 NO, NOT AT ALL

18. Do you ever talk to anyone about your parent's divorce?

YES, A LOT 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 NO, NEVER

19. Have you talked to anyone at your church about your parent's divorce? (circle a number)

1. YES
2. NO

20. Who in your church have you talked to about your parent's divorce?  
(Check as many as you have talked with)

- |                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (a) _____ MINISTER              | (f) _____ YOUTH ADVISOR |
| (b) _____ SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER | (g) _____ FRIEND        |
| (c) _____ YOUR MOTHER           | (h) _____ YOUR FATHER   |
| (d) _____ A RELATIVE            | (i) _____ A COUNSELOR   |
| (e) _____ OTHER                 |                         |

21. Has your church ever had a group just for kids to talk about divorce? (circle a number)

1. YES
2. NO

Thank you for answering these questions!

+++++

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8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
The Brethren are so oriented toward married couples that divorced  
or single persons are less comfortable in the church.

STRONGLY AGREE 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 STRONGLY DISAGREE

9. Do you have personal friends in your church? (circle a number)

1. YES  
2. NO

10. If yes, how often do you see them? (circle a number)

VERY OFTEN 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 ALMOST NEVER

11. Do you have relatives in the Church of the Brethren? (please check)

- (a) \_\_\_\_\_ PARENTS (d) \_\_\_\_\_ GRANDPARENTS  
(b) \_\_\_\_\_ AUNTS, UNCLES (e) \_\_\_\_\_ COUSINS  
(c) \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER

12. If yes, are any of them in your congregation? (circle a number)

1. YES  
2. NO

13. Would you please check any of the following things that you or your  
children have received from people in your church in the last year.

(Check as many as apply.)

- (a) \_\_\_\_\_ DAY CARE (g) \_\_\_\_\_ INCIDENTAL BABY SITTING  
(b) \_\_\_\_\_ FINANCIAL HELP (h) \_\_\_\_\_ MEALS/FOOD  
(c) \_\_\_\_\_ COUNSELING (i) \_\_\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION  
(d) \_\_\_\_\_ HOUSING (j) \_\_\_\_\_ VISITS AT YOUR HOME  
(e) \_\_\_\_\_ A REFERRAL TO SERVICES (WOMEN'S/MEN'S GROUPS, COUNSELORS,  
LAWYERS, ETC.)  
(f) \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

=====

Thank you for answering these questions! Now, we would like to ask a few  
questions about how a divorce might effect participation in the church.

If you have ever been divorced would you please continue and answer the  
following questions.

14. How long has it been since you were divorced? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Have you remarried? (circle a number)

1. YES  
2. NO

(Please continue on the next page)

17. Where do your children spend most of their time? (circle a number)

18. Since your divorce, have you changed church memberships?

19. Has your attendance at church changed since your divorce?

20. Has the number of things you do in your church changed since your divorce?

21. Overall, how helpful has your church been to your children since you divorce?

22. Would you please check any of the following things you or your children have received from your church since your divorce? (Check as many as apply)

- (Please go to the back of this page for the final questions)



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